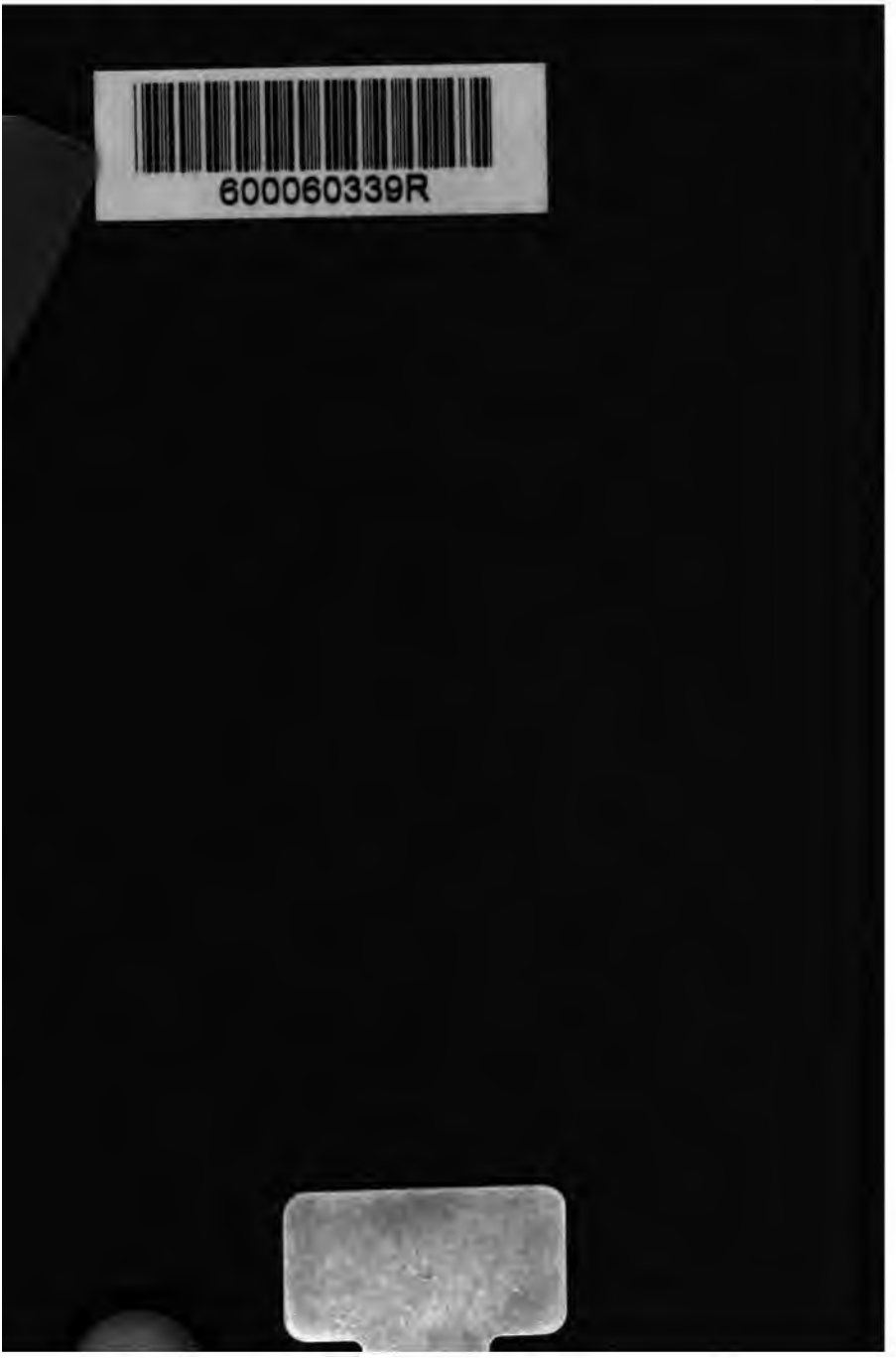
A Basil Plant

by

Ethel Coxon



A BASIL PLANT.

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A PRESENT DAY STORY.

BY

ETHEL COXON,

AUTHOR OF "MONSIEUR LOVE."

"He once called her his basil plant; and when she asked for an explanation, said that basil was a plant which had thriven wonderfully on a murdered man's brains."—MIDDLEMARCH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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A BASIL PLANT.

CHAPTER I.

"And all in vain you strive against the stream."
SHAKESPEARE.

BUT Max's knowledge of his folly did not serve to cure him of it. It had struck its roots too deeply for that, though the sense that at present it would be hopeless to attempt to win Evelyn, served to check his words. He very seldom saw her; seemed, even to himself, to shrink from her presence—and, perhaps, the instinct which led him to do so was wise.

Two years drifted on without bringing any sudden or notable change to Evelyn Goring, or to Roland and his wife ; except, indeed, the birth of Gertrude's second baby about a year after that of her first. The poor little thing, however, only lived a week, and Gertrude hardly felt the loss, not of what had been, but of possibilities that never would be now. No third baby came, and at two years old Master Hugh Trench was a Turk of the first water—a young gentleman with a most decided will of his own, and a yet stronger determination to exercise it.

The second July, after the Gorings' return to England, Evelyn was spending the end of the summer with the Trenches in Warwickshire. She had been looking rather pale and fagged, so that both Mr. Goring and Mrs. Trench (Roland's mother) had insisted on her leaving her

father in town, and enjoying the full sweetness of the summer in the country's leafy heart. Gertrude was also staying down at Colethorpe with Hugh, and Roland ran down whenever he could, which was not often. Later on, he and Gertrude were going to the Engadine for a month, and, after that, they had a round of country-house visits to accomplish. Gertrude had been rather vexed at having to leave London before the end of the season; but the doctor had commanded it, and Roland had made her obey, though she had persisted in staying in town till nearly the end of June.

She, Evelyn Goring, and Dora Trench were sitting working one morning in a hay-field near the house, while Hugh was playing in the hay at a little distance from them. The hay was half cut and deliciously sweet, and the group of women

looked pretty and cool under the shade of a great elm. Evelyn's fortnight in the country had given her back all she might have lost of faint fresh bloom and liquid clearness of eyes. Gertrude, too, was looking all the better for her rest; but both her features and complexion had lost something of their varying charm. They were beautiful still, but more fixed; neither her smile nor the tint on her cheek changed quite so swiftly or delicately as they had been wont to do. She was a lovely woman; but something of that morning flush which had given her beauty such exquisite radiance, had faded even before its time. Dora, a pretty girl of twenty-two, with large dark eyes, a mouth like that of a Cupid, a face resembling her brother's in shape, and a transparent colour on her dark, clear-tinted cheek, was laying back amid the hay, with her

hands clasped under her head, as she gazed through half-shut eyelids at the sky, and now and then made reflections on things in general.

"A telegram!" said this young lady, starting up, on seeing a servant coming across the field towards them with an orange-coloured missive. "For you, Gertrude, of course. When is my illustrious brother coming?"

"To-night," answered Gertrude, as she read the telegram, "and he brings Mr. Breynton with him."

Dora made a comic face of despair, and flung herself down on the grass again.

"Mynheer Bruin!" she exclaimed. What on earth for? He hates women, or behaves as if he did; and here he will be in the midst of us. It's too bad."

"For whom?" said Evelyn.

"Oh! it's very well for you; you know

him, but I don't; that is, I hardly do, and what I do know I don't like. He hasn't an idea of—of—of talking to a girl," continued the young lady, rather viciously.

"You would like him if you knew him better," said Evelyn.

"But I never should know him better if I lived to be a hundred," returned Dora. "He doesn't care for a thing I do, and can't even assume a virtue he doesn't happen to have. I'm sorry, Eve, if he is a friend of yours, but I don't like him. Well!" springing up again, "I must go in and tell Hartly to get things ready. Mamma is asleep, and I can't disturb her for all the Mr. Breyntons in the world."

"It is curious, Mr. Breynton's coming down suddenly like this," said Gertrude, when Dora had left the field. "Roland has asked him down each summer, and he would never come before."

Neither she nor Evelyn knew that it had been the casual information, given by Roland, that Evelyn Goring was down at Colethorpe, which had prompted Max's sudden acceptation of Trench's invite down there; nor could Gertrude or her companion guess how, two or three hours later, Max regretted his acceptance, even while he was being whirled through Oxfordshire with Roland in an express train.

It was nearly dinner time when the two men reached Colethorpe, and they went straight up to their rooms. Max did not take long over his toilet, and descended to the drawing-room, wishing very heartily he had never left London. He felt a pleasure and relief when he discovered the only person yet in the room was Evelyn, and he was at his ease, and enjoying the influence of the sweet air and the fair scene outside—of all the outward surroundings

which formed the setting to the figure of the woman he loved—when Roland entered.

Roland was not looking well; the last two years had wrought a greater change in him than they had in Gertrude. The old bright look—"as if he had been looking on some glorious sight"—had gone, or only came at times. The lines of the lips had changed; they were sad, a little bitter; and young as he was, there were traces of furrows on his forehead, above the straight brows, which were drawn down with the wearied expression of a man whose life clue is tangled. He looked older than his years, and both Max and Evelyn dimly and sadly felt to themselves that all things were not well with this man, whom the world hailed as fortunate and successful beyond his fellows.

And he himself knew that the complete life he had once dreamt of was no

longer possible to him—he had made a mistake.

He loved his wife, she loved him; but the terrible, deadly question faced him—Wife or Art? Not both. He must set himself into direct antagonism to Gertrude, if he devoted himself simply and fully to doing the best that was in him, without thought of fame or reward, only of Urania's smile on her good and faithful servant, who had striven loyally, however imperfectly, in her service.

Roland would fain have chosen bravely. It would have mattered little to him whether the husk of his outward life had been smooth or rough, if the inward spirit had been sweet and beautiful. He had it in him to scorn delights and live laborious days—the beauty and joy of his art being so supreme as to outweigh all else. But he was not strong enough to conquer

Gertrude; he loved her, and in that lay his weakness.

She could not sympathize with him as regards his work: it is needless to define the standpoint from which she viewed Art: so many see it as she did. She never made the solecisms now in talking on it that she had done when she was first married. Association with the set in which she partly moved had trained her perfectly in the art shibboleth, and she seldom made a mistake. But her inward view of the matter remained unchanged. She still held that a painter must be doing well by himself and his Art when all men spoke well of him, when his canvases were dreams of sweet lines and fair faces, were hung on the line, and fetched large prices and eulogistic reviews.

Why labour a whole year over an unpopular picture, when in the same time

one might paint a dozen that should be admired, bought, and engraved; so enabling one to live with all fair outward surrounding such as is lovely, when it expresses an inner life?

The constant pressure on Roland was too strong. He was resolute at first to be true to his inspirations, even at all loss; but there came a time when, feeling half mad between the conflicting influences of his life, he made one pleading, passionate appeal to his wife, imploring her to play her true part; to help him in his attempts to reach the highest possible; so that, however simply they lived, it should be with that upward yearning that should make life a divine struggle worthy all hardship, and even a noble failure, beautiful. So he spoke in a moment of intense emotion, baring his very soul to her.

Vain, vain! There was no answer,

only a caress and soft words meaning nothing. His heart sank with a passionate, terrible sadness of loneness, as he knew he and she could never understand each other—that between them was a great gulf fixed.

He sat long brooding over the fire that night, after Gertrude had gone upstairs. A broken life his seemed to him just then. Was it worth while to struggle? Should he not surrender at once, and without longer endeavour waste life's coin on the bread which, though it satisfied not his hunger, contented Gertrude's?

He rose and went upstairs. His wife was asleep, her face sweetly flushed against the snowy pillows, the full white lids of her eyes closed, with their long lashes sleeping on the curve of her cheek. Her lips were lightly parted, while one white hand and arm lay on the pillow,

thrown upward above her head, and resting on the tangle of her bright hair. The sleeve had slipped back, showing the subtle beauty of the delicate wrist, melting with exquisite curves into the arm. A sense of her beauty filled his being, mingled almost with remorse as he thought of her tenderness and her pride in him. Whatever happened, she must be happy; he must not fail in that. He stooped and kissed her lips; she opened her eyes and raised her face to him: but from that night, his marriage never meant all it had done before to Roland.

Since then his work had been, as it were, a compromise between the instincts and longings which would not be crushed, and the leadings of his ordinary life; and it was as wretched a thing as such compromises generally are. He worked faithfully at what he did, and his work was

good, but the very struggle and contest of influences hindered the spirit which should have inspired it.

It was this which pressed on him that made his face, even now at eight and twenty, weary. Money must be found, that was clear, and it would only be gained by work. He felt especially tired and worried to-day; he had been working hard, and with little satisfaction to his own soul, and a heavy bill had come in a little while before, besides several accounts for Gertrude's dress, etc. They were not very extravagant: the world would have held them perfectly justifiable, considering the income Roland had the means of making, if he pleased; and why should he not please? But the consequence to Roland was, that he had to postpone working at a picture, the idea of which had possessed him for a long while, and

finish off some, with the treatment of which he was by no means satisfied, to meet the expenses. The first thing was to keep clear of debt.

In spite, however, of these and other worries, he came down the stairs at Colethorpe with the pleasant feelings of a holiday before him; a short time of sweet quiet and rest; long rides under the meeting trees of the Warwickshire lanes; lawn tennis, and cool morning swims in the clear meadow-bordered and elm-shaded waters of the Avon, with the morning sunlight flashing golden through the shallows, and striking the river's depths into olive green.

So he passed through the wide, quiet hall, with the sense of repose resting on everything, as falling from the deep-leaved elms outside the window, dark against the sky in the cooler light. Dora's pet doves,

not yet asleep, were perched among the flowers in the open window-frame, cooing to each other with a sweet monotony; and the casement was half veiled by the long hanging trails of a purple clematis just beginning to blossom. Roland opened the drawing-room door and saw there, in the still light, two figures—Evelyn, her head a little raised, her eyes intent, as she listened to what Max was saying.

Something in the simple group quickened the vague feeling which had dwelt in Roland's heart of late, and had had its first engendering that day two years ago, when he had been struck by Max's look and tone, as he noticed the resemblance between Evelyn and Roland's Castara. Now the magnetic assurance of another person's feelings, which we have all experienced, made Roland certain of Max's.

But Evelyn—what did she feel? Roland could not tell.

True, sweet, simple friend she had been to Roland after his marriage, even as before. It was a rest to him to rely on the thought of her true sympathy and delicate comprehension; yet he had not often sought her of late. Her own sensitiveness had made her withdraw a little from the old intercourse, feeling that what she had enjoyed was now his wife's right, and hers alone. Foolish this, perhaps, but natural: a man's men-friends may be the same to him when he is married as before, his women friends cannot be. Still there was no constraint in her manner to Roland; such change as there was, was so instinctive, that she herself was unconscious of it; and even Roland had not considered it, though it might have influenced him. The real reason that had caused him to hold himself somewhat aloof from Evelyn, was the inner assurance that the course he

was drifting into would not content her wishes for him.

She had not seen him on his arrival, and as he entered the room, rose to meet him, freshly and gladly, without any shade of embarrassment, such as might have marked her manner had there been anything in Max's conversation to make her either glad or vexed at the entrance of a third person. Dora came in soon, followed by Gertrude and Mr. and Mrs. Trench. Roland took Evelyn into dinner; but the talk was general, and he had no chance of discovering, by look or word, if her guarded heart had surrendered to Breynton.

"How she would love," thought Roland to himself, when he and his father and Max were sitting over their wine after dinner. Mr. Trench the elder and Breynton were engaged in a political

discussion, and Roland, as he sipped his claret, looked out through the window, where he could see the light dresses of the women on the lawn. Gertrude and his mother were seated on two wicker chairs, while Dora was flitting towards the strawberry beds for the late predatory raid in the dusk, which was her favourite form of dessert. Evelyn was walking up and down the lawn, as he had seen her so often in the twilight, long ago, in the old garden in Kensington.

Had she ever loved? Had she ever loved him? She had denied him, when he had asked her to be his wife—how long ago was it? Only six years; yet how dead it all seemed,—but had any later flower of tenderness for him blossomed in her heart? Or was its bloom now budding forth freshly in all womanly perfection to meet Max's love. Roland's foot

ground against the floor involuntarily; he could not have told why.

"Pass the claret, old fellow," he said suddenly to Max; then, when he had drank another glass slowly, he added, "Come along out now; the pater and you can go on with your quarrel another time; you'll never finish it. You owe me a debt of gratitude" to his father, "for bringing down such a Radical as Max for your benefit. I'm awfully obliged to him for saving me the trouble of squabbling on points I don't care a straw about."

"I'd rather have Breynton and his Radicalism, than your d—d Liberalism," growled Mr. Trench, as the two younger men left the room by the window, and crossed the lawn to where Gertrude was sitting.

"Are we going to leave all the straw-

berries to Dora?" inquired Roland. "I feel to want some."

"Very well," said his wife, rising indolently, and gathering her soft chuddah shawl round her. "Come, Eve!"

She and Evelyn, followed by Roland and Max, set off to where Dora was bending down among the British Queens, holding her pretty white gown with one hand, while she searched for fruit with the other. Feasting on strawberries in the dusk of a July evening is a by no means contemptible enjoyment, especially when one has just escaped from the heat and glare of the London streets. The twilight seemed only to turn into the day grown pale, as the rosy western light faded to tenderest amber, melting into that tint of beryl which is as the fairest memory of a summer sea. The great moon brightened and brightened till her light lay like snow

or silver on the thick trees and dark shrubberies and the wide hay-fields, the scent of which came across the garden laden with an infinite fragrance of association: the lovely perfume of the dying grass, the sweet breath of summer herself.

"It is too delicious for us to go indoors," said Gertrude. "Let's go down to the hay-field."

If Mrs. Trench senior had been there, she would assuredly have spoken of the dangers of falling dews and thin shoes; but she was indoors, placidly engaged by this time with her husband in their nightly piquet by the light of the drawing-room lamp; so the party in the garden wandered down to the hay-field through the silent evening, with no sound but the soft rustle of the boughs, stirred by "evening's wandering airs," or the fainter movement of a sleeping bird.

Gertrude had slidden her arm through her husband's, and the two girls were walking together, while Max loitered some little way behind; when Dora suddenly exclaimed—

"Eve! I've never answered the Vigors' note about the tennis set, and it must be sent over to-night. I must go and see about it at once, and send Jack with it now, before he goes home. I had better tell them, too, that Roland and Mr. Breynton will go over there with us to-morrow. They will be glad, I know, for they want men."

Evelyn smiled a little to herself at the idea of Max Breynton at a garden party, amid the general gathering of country society and its conventionalities. Dora ran off to fulfil her delayed duty, and Evelyn wandered along by herself, the smile still lingering in her eyes.

CHAPTER II.

"Fair, and of all, beloved, I was not fearful
Bluntly to give my life into your hand,
And at one hazard all my earthly means."
A Woman Killed with Kindness.

SHE rambled on till she came to the banked hedge skirting the field, and which was lush with a thick growth of bracken, fern, and meadow-sweet. Evelyn had a special fondness for the last, and instinctively gathered some of its white, fragrant, misty sprays of blossom, to enjoy their scent, moving them so that their softness might brush her face.

She heard a slight movement behind her, and turning round saw Max.

"What were you thinking of?" he asked.

"I fancy my ideas were rather a muddle," she answered. "One thought was, which of my gowns will do best for a smart garden party to-morrow!"

"A garden party!" echoed Max, in a tone of horror. "Shall we all have to go?"

"Dora has just gone in to write a note to Lady Vigors, announcing your advent. They are very nice people."

"Yes; but I am not, Miss Goring. I dare say I seem egotistical to you in funking it, when it doesn't matter a jot to any one whether another coat and hat —shocking bad ones too—are there or not; but the habit's grown on me, so that though I know I am a fool, I can't help it."

"I know," said Evelyn. The sympathy

in her tone touched Breynton oddly; it was such a small matter, but it was always the same. She never took what he said wrongly, never imagined rudenesses he did not mean, or looked blankly at him in answer to a remark. "But I think it is a pity," she added.

"I wish myself I were more civilized," he said, with a queer laugh; "but it isn't in me." Then, with a sudden change, he asked, "What was the other thought in your mind, besides your dress?"

"No thought," she answered, "only the memory of another person's."

"What?"

"A line of Emily Brontë's was running in my head—

'With that clear dusk of heaven which brings the thickest stars.'

It is curious how one line of a poem will haunt one sometimes."

"That one is good," said Max, "especially on an evening like this. But what kind of lines make themselves your companions?" A dim memory of Sir Thomas Overbury's "fair and happy milkmaid" floated in his mind as he spoke.

"I don't know," said Evelyn. "I suppose they are such as 'come and go in the air like music;' but one could not always explain their charm; or why, sometimes, one line will call up the whole poem. That line in the 'Revolt of Islam,' for instance—

'There sat a lady, beautiful as morning.'

It is very simple, yet it always brings back to me the whole of the first canto."

"I don't know much of Shelley," answered Max, curtly, prompted thereunto by a gruff honesty. "I don't understand him."

Evelyn was silent for a moment. There

came back to her, sweet as the perfume of the dying grass, the memory of long dead days, when she, a child of fourteen, had listened to Roland's voice reading that poetry, which seemed to reveal to her a rarer and intenser beauty in life and the earth and sky.

"Neither, I suppose, do I," she answered; "but sometimes things which one cannot understand are best. I mean," she added, conscious that she must seem very foolish —"when one knows there is a meaning, and has a glimpse of it—and that glimpse grows."

"If one be certain, there is a meaning," said Max.

"I think in poetry," said Evelyn, "the scent is sometimes worth more than any substance. It is not deep lines always that cling to my memory."

"What are they then?"

"Scraps of old ballads, like—

'Else must I to the green wood go
Alone, a banished man.'"

"That is for the sake of the whole poem," returned Max.

"Yes; or tiny poems like Blake's 'Sunflower'—though that is deep—and lines like—

'And the primrose spreads so sweetly.'"

The moonlight, the low sweet voice, the face he loved, had a strange effect on Breynton. He would hardly have believed at another moment that he could have, as he would have termed it, "lost his confounded head so utterly"—in other words, have so completely forgotten the morbid shyness and pride which covered him as with a garment.

"I know the feeling," he said; "for one line has haunted me over three years."

"What?" she asked, innocently; but

as she looked up at his face in the moonlight she was startled. Then she knew, what till now she never imagined. In that moment it all flashed on her. She had never seen such a look on a man's face before as that which filled the strong, sensitive countenance before her; and her woman's instinct taught her it would be but the expression of a love more intense, truer and deeper and more passionate, than had ever been offered her before.

"'I am, love, and cannot change'"—he began. Then suddenly, in his own words, "No, nothing tells it—no words—but you know."

She looked at him, a strange distress on her face. "Oh, why?" she exclaimed; then she was silent.

"Why have I told you? Do you know I have held myself back all these three years, waiting and fearing, till I cannot

bear it any longer. I had to tell you; I could not go on talking to you as though you were apart from my life, instead of being its very soul. I have had time enough to think of you, time enough to call myself a fool in; but all the same I must tell you of my folly, and know from you it is no good."

He had spoken rapidly, hurriedly, and then there was a silence, and he felt very cold. It is very rarely, if ever, a man speaks as he had done without holding a hope, however faint a one, in his heart.

"Is there no chance for me?" he said at last.

It was with almost a sob she answered—

"If I could help you!"

"Only in that one way," said Max. "Love me. I would make you content, you might be sure of that. I know, when I think of you and of myself, I have no right to ask

this, but you told me once, 'Love makes the balance equal.' Can it not do so now?"

For one moment the influence of his strong passion shook her heart. She felt as though this great love offered her so humbly would be a pillar of strength against which to lean. It was only for a moment. Then her truer womanhood rose within her, and she shuddered, as with horror, seeing that for one instant a loveless marriage had seemed possible to her—a marriage such as would be a sin, both against the man who loved her, and the very sin against her own soul. The revulsion of feeling gave her strength to speak, as she could hardly have done under the influence of a less strong emotion.

"Love would make all equal, but I have not it to give; and if I had it, you would give far more than I could, though

nothing weighs by it. It would kill me; I could not live."

Were her words cruel? At all events they were strong and true; and so Max felt them to be, even through his pain.

"It is better you should say this, if you feel it," he said. "And yet, if you would have let me, I think I could have made you care for me in time."

A belief shared by most of Max's sex in regard to any woman to whom they choose to throw the handkerchief. However unselfish a man may be, he is never so in pleading his love, and Evelyn, not loving Max, felt something of this, which made her answer intensely—

"I never could."

"Well!" he said, with a sigh that held such pain as roused her pity; for indeed it was pain to her: keen and bitter to hear the entreaties she could, yet would not,

grant. They were very different to Roland's pleading of his boyish passion, and she knew this imported much to Max, more than she could fully understand.

"Don't say anything like this again," she entreated, rather pleadingly. "It is an honour to me, your caring for me, and that pains me. I feel as though I had done you a cruel wrong.

"Do you?" He took both her hands in his and bent down his forehead on them. "I won't say any more; but I cannot alter. You know that."

They stood silent for a few moments, he looking at her with a great sadness in his eyes. Then he spoke—

"What do you wish me to do? Will it trouble you to see me after this? Would you rather I went away—I mean, not come and see you till you have a little forgotten this? It would be better, perhaps?"

"Yes," she said; then was struck by a sudden remorse. For a moment she seemed to see how lonely a life was that of the man before her—who had no one to live for, and whose heart she had refused. "But when you wish," she said, "come—it is as you like. If you knew how sorry I am."

A rather bitter smile touched his lips. "My liking is not much," he said; "but you will let me come or not as the mood takes me, then? I might have known it would be like this. How should you care for me, when——" he paused. Not for the world would he have let her suspect he had read her feelings for Roland, years before. "Some day, things may be changed, and you will love a man, as it is in you to love."

"Never," she said. There was no sorrow or regret in her tone, only a certainty, quiet and a little sad.

He wondered if she still retained any trace of her old feeling for Roland, and if it were that which prompted her words. A man can hardly understand how with some women who have loved with all the strength of their hearts, all love may be slain for the man they have cared for, so that they meet him as calmly as any other friend, and yet are unable to think of any other man, the power of such love seeming dead within them. It is not so with a man: he may love one woman only, but if her image vanish from his heart, it is swept and garnished, ready for the next inmate. He cannot understand how a woman, whose once strong love is dead, closes the door of her heart and sits there alone, seeing love's face "on the four walls of it, the better that they are so blank." *La Reine est morte, vive la Reine;* but if Love, the King, be dead, there is only a

blank silence and emptiness in the heart, once his palace and now his grave. Women of this nature are rare, but they do exist. Max did not comprehend, despite his feeling for Evelyn, that her love for Roland was dead, but its memory too strong to let her care for any other man in the same way.

Roland and Gertrude were wandering together some little way apart from where Max and Evelyn stood, but Roland's eyes were fixed on the two figures who seemed conversing so intently. A bad, bitter jealousy he would not have owned to himself took possession of his mind. Would Breynton really win this girl, whom he, Roland, had known all his life, who had understood his moods far more perfectly than any one else had ever done? Were her earnestness and grace, and the sweet impetuousness which underlay her quiet-

ness, all to gladden Max's life, to be his own? Max was a good fellow, clever, true—but—

"What are you looking at?" said his wife: then her eyes followed his. "A picture," she said, with a laugh; "or it would be one, if Mr. Breynton were better looking, and it meant anything."

"Why should it not mean anything?" said Roland, a little savagely.

"As if a girl like Evelyn could care for him. He may be clever, or whatever you like, but he has no manners—or what he has are horribly bad; he isn't good looking; he dresses vilely, and his coats always look as though they need brushing. Women don't fall in love with men like that."

From whence it will be seen that Max's opinions on the subject of himself, as recorded two chapters back, were confirmed by Gertrude's.

CHAPTER III.

"Oh, lady, we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone doth nature live."

COLERIDGE.

ROLAND was up early the next morning, tramping through the fields grey with dew towards the river, to enjoy his morning swim. It was still early when he returned towards the house, and the garden stretched before him, cool in its morning freshness, and glad with the full chorus of the birds. It was such a day as acts like a charm on tired spirits and heated brains; the very dew seemed that subtle essence which, if eye and face were washed in it, would make all things appear

new; and the air held such sweet freshness and stillness, that the heavy July roses seemed breathing it silently with a great delight. But what words will describe the spring of a Midsummer day, those early morning hours, which wear the beauty of promise, and are tranquilly bright in the level rays of the sun?

As Roland returned across the garden after his bathe, he saw it was no longer untenanted. Evelyn was standing on the grass, smoothing the plumage of Dora's two doves, who were perched on her wrist, feeding on some Indian corn held in her hand. She did not see him at once, and there was a grave look of puzzled trouble in her eyes, which were not fixed on the birds, but gazing away to the thin line of the Malvern Hills in the distance. Roland did not see the expression of her face, and she looked

part of the morning to him. Indeed her countenance was bright enough as they greeted.

"I didn't think any one else would be up yet," he said. "I ought to have known you were always an early riser, Eve!"

"Because we had a garden," said Evelyn, as the doves finished the corn, and she raised her wrist with a pretty movement, to throw them off into the air. One flew to the top of the pine-tree, with a rustle of his smooth grey wings through the air; but the other took short circling flights round Evelyn's head, and finally perched on her shoulder, where it rested, cooing softly.

"You are not going in?" said Roland, as she seemed about to retrace her steps to the house. "The only reason for getting up early is to be out of doors. Come down to the river and see the

water-lilies and irises. You have no idea how perfect they are, white and green and gold, with that clear, many-tinted water."

They were worth seeing, certainly, and so Evelyn owned, as she stood by the bank of the river, looking at the tangled stretch of sedge and bulrushes, with their tall brown spears, among which shot up the golden-headed shafts of the yellow irises. By them, and beyond, stretching out into the midst of the stream, serenely floated the white lilies, just opening their hearts, with their vibrating golden rays, to the morning sun. Roland stretched a stick into the water, and with a little difficulty reached one of the lilies for Evelyn. She held it, wondering, as she looked at it, why, for all its beauty, the flower seemed somehow as though it were removed from human sympathies. We

feel the rose akin to us; the passion-flower and the violet tell us the secrets they share with us; the sunflower's face is as that of a friend; but the lotus-flower, pure, mystic, passionate, and cold, born of the water and the moonlight, holds a silence and a secret we cannot understand.

Something of this feeling moved Evelyn's mind as she looked at the pure curves of the white petals, in the midst of which the quivering golden tentacles trembled as with life.

"Did you ever happen to hear of a sacred inscription of the lotus met with in Thibet?" said Roland.

Evelyn laughed. "You know I never read books of travels."

"Neither do I. I met this proverb, quoted in a very charming fairy tale I read once, with a note stating its origin, and it fascinated me, partly because it was

utterly incomprehensible,—'Aum Mane Padme, Aum.'"

"It is incomprehensible enough."

"I don't think you will understand the English much better; I don't.—'Oh, the jewel in the lotus! Amen.'"

Eve stood thoughtfully looking at her white flower.

"It is beautiful," she said.

"If you find it so," replied Roland with meekness, "I should be awfully glad if you will explain its meaning."

She smiled. "It is rather odd. Mr. Breynton and I were talking last night about the melody of certain lines having a charm apart from their meaning——" Then she remembered the end of the conversation to which she referred, and grew hotly, irrationally red with anger at herself. Roland did not appear to notice it; but in reality he saw and mis-

construed the pure and eloquent blood which spoke in her cheeks, and the jealousy he had felt the night before revived the more keenly that he had to suppress its appearance. "I shouldn't think Max had much appreciation of 'the lyrical cry,'" he said, drily.

"Why not?" asked Evelyn, rather hotly.

"I never found it part of his nature. But what do you make of the grand Llama's proverb?"

"Nothing; but I am glad to know of it. The jewel in the lotus."

"Yes, there is a strange charm in it," he said, "because it must have a meaning, known to the men who found in it the expression of a mystery, which they believed in."

"I don't want to understand it; I think I would rather not."

"The lotus has small value without its jewel," he said, moodily.

She understood the interpretation the proverb had for him; the outward beauty of art, soulless and fair; the lily without its jewel. She knew she had guessed rightly when in another moment he told her of the picture he wished to paint. He found it easy to speak under the inspiration of Evelyn's earnest eyes, which deepened as they listened to his words, and for the instant both felt as if the work were completed, and they saw it in its fulness. "I don't know when I shall find time for it," Roland said at last, the bright look fading from his face, "there is so much else to do. And—well, I suppose no one lives up to his ideas, or even tries to do so."

Evelyn said nothing, but her face struck Roland as with an unconscious reproach. He felt as though he did not deserve her

sweet faith in his power and his aim, and he longed that she should still think well of him. The shadow of constraint that seemed to have hung between them had vanished; the old friendliness was dear and true as ever, and they talked in the old way again—or so Roland thought.

When they returned from the meadow, Evelyn went into the house, while Roland stayed in the garden. He watched her as she left him, the shining head, the gracious slender form: he thought of the face, not beautiful, but grown into such a loveliness of sweetest womanhood as outweighed far more radiant faces.

"Oh, the jewel in the lotus! Amen," he thought.

CHAPTER IV.

"I have lost the dream of doing,
And the other dream of done,
The first spring in the pursuing,
The first pride in the begun,
First recoil from incompletion in the face of what is won."

MRS. BROWNING, *The Lost Bower.*

MRS. FIELD was having a big afternoon tea the first Monday in May. It was about five o'clock, and her drawing-rooms were crowded with the usual throng, while the odours of the hot-house flowers, piled in great pyramids about the room, and glowing round the warm whiteness of statues, the hue of which was mellowed by time,

mingled their sweetness agreeably enough with the fragrance of coffee, which arose from the rooms below. A song, "Since first I saw thy face," filled the room with its sweet, grave harmony, and seemed just a little out of keeping with the moving, restless crowd, the hum of scarcely repressed conversation, and even with the handsome hostess with her cloud of dark hair, her heavy Eastern ornaments, and dress of dull Venetian red, and with the hope in her mind that there would be various complimentary paragraphs in the society papers about Mrs. Field's afternoon tea.

Evelyn Goring was seated in the shadow of a curtained recess, enjoying the music, which was good, and talking with a lady who happened to be seated by her side; a sensible, plain-featured, kind-faced matron, who looked as though she had very little

comprehension or enjoyment of the throng round her. Evelyn was interested in her kindly, simple account of her boy's winning a scholarship and her daughter's fondness for music, and was half annoyed, half amused, to see a young man in the crowd, Max Breynton's pet aversion, Gerard Dayrell, making his way towards her.

Mr. Dayrell, as an artist, had not greatly advanced during the years that had passed since he had expressed a desire to paint Miss Anley as Gautier's uncanny heroine, thereby rousing Roland's wrath; but there really was considerable charm in his work. It was delicate and graceful, though lacking in strength, and possessed with a feeling of beauty precious enough in these days. The man somewhat resembled his work: despite his affectation, there were certain gleams of an unworldly single-heartedness in his love of beauty, a touch of chivalry

and sweetness of nature, which made women like him, and pardon much. Yet in a quick and nervous mood Mr. Dayrell was apt to irritate, and perhaps Evelyn was not sufficiently grateful to fate when he sat down by her side, and talked in a low grave tone about the pictures of the year's Academy.

"Did you see my little head of Mrs. Trench?" he said at last. "Do you think I have in any way caught the *geist* of her beauty? I almost despair of it now myself; there is a subtlety in her expression which escapes one—one knows not how. It is like the lovely vision of maidenhood, Tieck's enchanter summoned up from the golden cup. If touched, it disappears."

Evelyn scarcely thought an answer was needed to this; but the puzzled expression of the lady on her other side amused her much, as did the latter's relieved sigh as an

acquaintance came up to her, and carried her off to the dining-room in search of refreshment, while Dayrell went on—

"But are not Trench's pictures exquisite?"

"Do you think so," said Evelyn, stupidly.

"They soothe one so utterly. Though how, indeed, could he paint other than exquisite things under the inspiration of his wife's eyes? There is one thing in Trench most charming: I know no one who has so infinitely the poet gift of seeing beauty and making others see it. A walk through a summer wood with him, or a lazy drifting down the Thames, is as a revealing of loveliness one felt but did not know before."

She knew what the young man said, affectedly expressed as it was, was true; she had known it years before.

"And that is what I think must make the presence of his wife a constant joy to him. It seems to me he has taught her to see with his eyes, so that the soul of her beauty is ever deepening, while she on her part has been all to him—the very spirit of his Art. Ah, there they are! How grand she looks!"

His last exclamation was right enough. Gertrude did look very splendid and handsome in her long fur-trimmed mantle of brown brocade, and the small close bonnet, which, somehow on her head, took the air of a diadem. She was very radiant, for her husband had recently been elected an Associate. Besides this, four of the five pictures he had sent in had been hung on the line, and she had to-day, as at the private view, seen them surrounded by constant, though ever-changing, clusters of visitors.

Yet Dayrell's words had rung in Evelyn's ears as bitter mockery as she saw Roland's face beside that of his wife. The look of strained anxiety in his eyes had deepened during the last few months, and though he was smiling and talking with the *debonnaire* insouciance of a man content with his lot in life, Evelyn still felt there was a trouble he bore, shared by no one, and least of all by his wife.

The brief smile lit up his face as he saw Evelyn; but he did not approach her till Dayrell had drifted away to pay his homage to Gertrude, and then he went up and asked her to come down with him and get some coffee.

"It is cooler down there," he said, "and you look tired to death with Dayrell's hysterics. What was he holding forth on?"

"I shall not flatter your vanity by telling you."

"Ye gods! was he praising me?"

"He finds your work exquisite."

"Oh, Eve! Eve! thou little knowest the mischief thou hast done. I shan't be able to paint for the next month, from the frightful feeling that Dayrell likes my work, and so it must be bad."

"That is going too far!"

"Is it?" said Roland, looking at her. Then he said suddenly, "If he finds it exquisite, Eve, you don't. No, don't try to say something civil. I know your face too well."

Indeed, his pictures of this year had been a grievous disappointment to Evelyn. She had missed in them—as she had never missed before—the spirit she loved in his work, and she could not gainsay his words.

"You are quite right," said Trench, as they descended the stairs together. "They

are not good. I know it as well as you do, perhaps better. I knew it as I painted them. All I want you to believe is that I tried to do my best, though I failed, I don't know how."

Evelyn wondered in her mind whether the fault lay at the root of the matter, that instead of striving to render a strong conception which possessed him, he had rested content in trying to realize a graceful fancy that had not sufficient heart in it to force him to call out all his power, and so his interest in the work had failed. But all she said was—

"Then why——"

"Why did I show them, you mean? Reasons of filthy lucre. We are not such stuff as our old dreams were made of—nor is life. Everything means money—no, I don't mean that, but it is hard to see rightly sometimes. Clouds are thick, and

one lives among them." His tone had changed from a would-be gaiety, born of pique, to a sadness which touched Evelyn Goring's heart with a sick pain for his trouble. She knew, she had known too long, the lowering influence which was pressing on his life.

"There is your coffee," he said, bringing her a cup. "Bitter?—never mind that; put some more sugar in, and forget the want of flavour. Coffee is coffee; there is no difference between one cup and another."

"The proof of the coffee is in the drinking."

"Not a bit of it. It is in the Sèvres cup and the sugar. The flavour doesn't matter: it is a delusion and a snare to care about it. We all find it so."

"I don't know why you talk like that," said Evelyn, rather vexed. "It is not clever; it is easy enough to do, and——"

"You don't like it," he said, in the manner of the Roland of old days, simple and kind. "I won't talk any more rubbish, nor try to excuse my faults by roundabout ways. It isn't any good either; for you know, I know, that those pictures had not enough work spent on them; that the treatment was slight; that they were pot-boilers in fact—what I used to swear I would never paint. There, I have said all the hard things you have been thinking, far more plainly than you would have had the heart to tell them me."

"Yet I don't like to hear you say them."

"Better be honest than dishonest," he answered. "I could act to other people, but not to you. You would find it out if I did; but, Eve, it is hard to hold a grip on the best side of one's life."

"It should not be to you," said Evelyn. You have so much to make it easy."

He turned round and looked straight into her eyes. When she had spoken she had thought of the blessing of the God-given artist nature; the power of rendering the beauty he saw, the thousand boons for which painter, poet, or musician, may well be humbly grateful; but something in his look showed her he thought she referred to other facts of his life.

"Do you think that?" he asked. "Really?" and his tone spoke more than his words.

All her loyal womanhood rose within her in anger and pain, that he should forget his manhood so as to even hint to her the want of something in his life—that want which should have been veiled jealously from all eyes. If he found his wife lacked fellow-feelings with him as to his art, Eve felt he should surely have hidden the fact closely, even from himself.

The girl's rule of faith was too delicate, strong, and true, to allow of any excuse of Roland's attempt to plead for sympathy on such grounds. She knew that Gertrude gave her husband as much as it was in her to give, and she was sorry for her, as for him.

Yes, as for him; for, blended with her anger against him, was a strange sore pity for him, and for the weakness which made him seek comfort in baring to another the sore spot at his heart. Had she not watched with passionate indignation the constant pressure which weighed him down? She would have given her very life to make Gertrude understand the value of the trust she held; but this only steeled her to hide the aching longing to comfort and help him—if indeed she could—and it was in her pride and her truth she spoke.

"Yes; you will prove it some day."

There was a hopeful prophecy in her tone, and a fine disregard of his implied complaint, which roused the nobler part of Roland's nature, and made him grateful for the quiet answer, and ashamed of having hinted at what, in another moment, he felt was far better left unsaid. He knew if he had once spoken out about his own life to Evelyn, there must ever after have been a constraint between him and her, the constraint being brought about by an unneeded confidence. Her woman instinct had prevented this, and Roland appreciated it.

"How is Hugh?" she asked, and Roland's face grew interested at once.

"Jolly as ever," he said. "He comes and sits in the studio now, and revels in painting after his own lights. I've set him up with a store of old colours and brushes. Gertrude's in mortal fear he'll find his end by sucking the paints; but the worst mis-

chief he has done yet was the other morning, when I was working hard and forgot to look after him. His lordship thought he could improve on my efforts, and devoted his energies to the painting up of a sketch I had left on the floor, propped up against the wall, to dry."

"Oh, Roland!"

"That's what Gertrude said; and she further declared I spoil my boy. I can't help it if I do, he is such a jolly little beggar with his cheekiness. I don't know what I should do without him."

"And he is so loving as well."

"Yes; come round and see him as soon as you can, Eve. He is very fond of you."

"Give him my love. I must be going now, it is growing late. Good-bye, Roland; say good-bye to Gertrude for me. I see Mrs. Field is down here, so I can slip off without going upstairs again."

CHAPTER V.

"You cannot think that the buckling on of a knight's armour by his lady's hand was a mere caprice of romantic fashion. It is the type of an eternal truth —that the soul's armour is never well set to the heart unless a woman's hand has braced it; and it is only when she has braced it loosely that the honour of manhood falls."—RUSKIN.

IT was nearly seven when Evelyn reached home, and the servant who opened the door told her that Mr. Breynton was with her father, and was going to stay to dinner. Max had not been to see the Gorings for some little while. His visits were always fitful, but Evelyn was glad when he came, as she knew her father enjoyed his society.

As to her own feelings in regard to

Breynton, they were difficult to define. Things had gone on, in outward seeming, between him and her in much the same manner as they had always done, though now and then a chance look or tone of Max's would remind Evelyn of that evening at Colethorpe, and she would long with a shrinking, almost akin to shame, never to see him again. But this was rare; and in general Max was so entirely his old self-that she could have fancied she had dreamed the scene it pained her to remember.

Breynton himself, despite her rejection of him, still found it pleasant to see her, talk with her, nay, even to know she knew how he held her in his heart. In his soul he never gave up the hope of winning her; he knew she trusted in him and held him as a friend; and so he waited.

Evelyn ran upstairs to change her dress for dinner before entering the studio, where

she knew she should find her father and Max.

"Well, young woman, you are back from your gaieties?" said her father, as a few minutes later she entered the studio in her usual evening gown of some soft silk of a subdued tone of grey-green, and with a cluster of primroses at her throat. "Were there many people there?"

"It was a shame your sending me, and escaping it yourself," said Evelyn, laughing. "Yes, there was a great crowd; and nearly all the people who talked with me asked if I did not think the ugliest pictures in the Academy 'too charming.'"

"What did you say?" asked Max.

"I don't know," answered Evelyn. "I believe I said that I had seen so many pictures, my head was quite confused. It wasn't true, but it was the most honest thing I could do."

"I don't see that," said Max. "Why not say straight out what you thought?"

"Because she remembered, like Sir Peter Teazle, that she left her character behind her," answered her father. "And if you disagree with people, they are certain to turn again and rend you behind your back."

"An impolite allusion to swine," said Max, quaintly. "Is Mrs. Field, Circe?"

"I haven't any pearls to bestow," returned Eve.

"And if you had," said her father, "they would object to your casting them before them if they proved their own jewels of opinions false; but our metaphors have become 'considerable mixed.'"

"Never mind," answered Breynton. "Drop them. You wouldn't really stop from telling a man that you thought a picture he had painted was bad because you were

afraid of what he might say about you afterwards?"

"I don't know with a man; I should with a woman."

"That's not fair, papa," put in Evelyn.

"*Fais ce que dois, advienne que pourra,*" said Max.

"But I don't know," answered Mr. Goring, "why I ought to abuse my neighbour's work. My object is to be at charity with all mankind. Why should I go out of my way to tell a fellow an unpleasant truth he won't thank me for, and which will most likely make him my enemy for life?"

"I didn't say that," said Max, somewhat impatiently. "Though, mind you, I think it better to go to that extreme than praise a thing you know to be bad."

"But one's opinion is of so little value," answered Evelyn. "I don't mean artists

like you and papa—but outsiders like myself, who are only part of the general public."

"That is right, Eve," said her father. "Be a very woman, and speak against the side of the question which has your sympathy, rather than agree with any one."

"I don't think any one is unimportant in this way," said Max, too much in earnest to leave the subject. "Be silent if you like, but if you speak, let it be the truth. It's very well to say that if you dispraise a book, or song, or picture, that what you say has no effect on the man whose work it is, except to make him dislike you personally. It may be so; but if you do the other thing, and praise it, you add yet another to the mass of voices which are doing the very worst for a fellow who has done bad work, making him believe it is good. He is ready enough to take the

vox populi for the *vox dei* if he get the chance."

Evelyn did not answer; but Max, looking for assent, found it in her eyes, and knew she went with him entirely.

Dinner was over, and Evelyn had left Max and her father to their cigars, to write some letters, that had to be posted that night, when Mr. Goring said suddenly—

"About what were you saying before dinner. What do you think of Roland Trench's pictures this year?"

Max's face changed, and the rut between his eyes—a frown always brought there—showed on his forehead. "I don't think they are like his work," he said curtly.

"Poor!"

"It isn't what they are, so much as what they mean."

"It will be a devilish good thing for him if they are elated right and left."

"They won't be; they are much too pretty."

"Well, here's a grand opportunity for putting your theory into practice. Tell him what you think."

A curious look passed over Max's face for a moment—a contraction as of pain in the pupils of his eyes—and though his companion could not see it, his mouth quivered under its veil of reddish-brown hair. He had vexed himself for some months, that the fear of paining Roland had prevented his saying what was in his mind. It was not as if he had seen his friend blind to the faults of his work. He had watched Roland toiling feverishly, unhealthily, nervously; and when Trench had turned to him with that underlying consciousness of failure in his eyes, he had not the heart to say what he thought, but had contented himself with commonplace

criticism, praising what could honestly be praised. He was angry with himself for his weakness, feeling almost as though he had been disloyal to his friend; but the feminine side of Roland Trench's nature often made Max treat him as though he had been a woman, with a nervous dread of wounding him.

"I couldn't do any good," said Max at last, with beautiful inconsistency. "What he is doing now is just what the public likes, and so does—his wife."

Goring looked sharply at his companion.

"You think it's she who is at the root of it?"

"I don't think about it," said Breynton. "You see it yourself as plainly as I do; it began almost from the first. Such a perfect wife," he went on, changing his tone; "so sympathetic to him; so proud of him; such a charming house; such delightful

evenings. The whole thing makes me sick. That woman will be the death of the painter in him. Then one hears that ass, Dayrell, as I did the other day at the club, speaking of the 'perfection of union.'" Here Max's patience gave out, and his speech ended in a growl.

"I never knew you observed it," said Goring. Then, as Max did not answer, he continued, "But you should consider one thing, Breynton, he might have married a woman whose existence was centered in Mantegna, as a young lady informed me hers was, the other day, and who would not have cared for him as his wife does. Affection and home life are great things to any man, artist or not, and especially to Roland."

"Home life," repeated Breynton, contemptuously. "A precious deal of home life Roland has. Why, she's seldom at home;

and since she's taken up these confounded theatricals, he sees less of her than ever. All very well to say she's so proud of him; she drags him out when he would rather be quiet at home. 'At home,' that's what his home life consists of. 'Mrs. Trench at home, music;' 'Mrs. Trench at home, dancing;' 'Mrs. Trench at home, Thursday evening, nine o'clock.' How is Roland to paint? I wonder he manages what he does."

"He slaves at his work," said Goring; "but I have fancied for some time his old pleasure in it doesn't help him."

"How the devil should it?" Max sighed impatiently, as if weary of the subject.

"They are all the same," said Mr. Goring. "It's very well to talk of a man giving hostages to fortune, but it depends what kind of soul and mind the hostage has. If a man marry such a woman as

Caroline Blake, or better still, Jane Carlyle, it is well enough. But look at the painters round you, and see how they marry directly or before they have made their names. Then the old story begins: big houses, artistic dresses, little dinners, large afternoons, two more pots in the swim. Mrs. Jones dines with Mrs. Brown, and sees that the Browns have a service of Powell glass for their table. The consequence is that Jones, who is over-worked already, has to paint a pot-boiler to pay for a like set of Salviati glass wherewith to shine down the Browns."

"But all women aren't like that," said Max. "Your daughter——"

"No, nor was her mother before her," said Mr. Goring, a softness filling his usual keen eyes. "I wonder what the young fellows of the present day would think of the first home of my wife and myself after

our marriage. She married me against her people's will, and we had not a penny beyond what I made to bless ourselves with. It was blessing ourselves, though, in that first floor in Tottenham Street, where I made out our income with drawing lithos for fashion plates; and she kept up my pluck. I remember now how she always wore a fresh white gown to meet me in, when I came home after a long day's sketching in the fields round Willesden. A couple of fools, and as happy as fools are. When better days came, she died. Better days?—no, there were no better days than those."

He looked up to where a portrait hung of a woman with a sweet, wistful, sensitive face, and great clear eyes like Evelyn, but with the different expression of mother and wife in her countenance. For a few moments his eyes dwelt on it with a yearning passion

of regret and love. Then his tone changed as he said, "We shall be out of the stir and coil this summer, I am glad to say."

"Are you going away?" inquired Max.

"At the beginning of June, thank Heaven. We've taken a cottage at Guernsey. Not in St. Peter's Port, but some miles out on the coast, right on the cliff, and with such scenery round. It will be worth your while to give us a month, Breynton, for the sake of sketching."

Max looked more heartily pleased at the idea than he had done for some time. "You'll find me an awful drag," he began.

"I shan't," said Goring, "and I don't believe Evelyn will. You had better go and ask her. There she is, playing. Let's go into the drawing-room," he added, as the soft tenderness of Rubinstein's Melody in F was heard faintly through the half-closed door.

Max always said he knew nothing about music, yet it would often put him in a dream; and now the air seemed to fit in sweetly with the idea of the future visit to Guernsey, and to quiet him even while it woke the memory of a half-mown hay-field, dewy and calm in the moonlight, a wide sky, and a tangled brake of fern and meadow-sweet.

CHAPTER VI.

"For it is a rare thing, except it be from a faithful and entire friend, to have counsel given, but such as shall be bowed and crooked to some end which he hath, that giveth it."—*Bacon's Essays.*

MAX BREYNTON was standing by the rustic fence which ran along the edge of the cliff, bounding the garden of the cottage the Gorings had taken at Guernsey for the summer months. The June morning was wonderful; but in spite of the splendour of the wrinkled lapis-lazuli sea, and the magnificence of the granite headland, which swooped round the tiny bay on one side of which the garden looked down, Max's face was perplexed and troubled,

and his feeling found vent in a muttered, "Confound it all!" as he replaced a letter he had been studying in his coat pocket.

A rustle through some bushes behind him made him look round to see Evelyn emerging, Dryad-like, from the tangle of a shaded path, which led by many windings and rock turnings down the cliff to the beach below. Her hair was hanging damp over her shoulders, showing she had been bathing; but nothing could spoil the bright face, which Max's eye caught for a moment, framed as it were in a leafy screen.

"I am in a dreadful state of untidiness," she said, as she stood on the lawn with Max. "But I thought you and papa had driven into St. Peter's Port."

"I changed my mind, and determined to give the morning to sketching. Will you come down with me to the beach, if you have nothing else to do? I want to have

a try at that headland while the tide is half out."

Eve assented, and she and Max scrambled down the pathway to the little bay below, and settled themselves under the shadow of a rock.

"You haven't any work with you," said Max, for the sake of saying something as he arranged his sketching materials.

"I seldom have in the open air; never by the sea. I like to be idle, and watch it."

She had leant back against the rock, and was gazing away at the measureless, restless blue waves, with the thin grey cloud of Jersey in the distance.

"It is quiet enough," said Max.

"Yes," she answered. Then she added, "And here I always like to think of the great eyes which looked across this sea for so many years."

She was half ashamed of herself when

she had spoken, for fear lest Max should think her silly and romantic; but Breynton did nothing of the kind. For himself he did not greatly worship Victor Hugo, but he could all the same respect the girl's reverence for that lonely Titan, with the great, tender, human heart. It was always a strange pleasure to him when she let him have a glimpse of that inner world of her life she seldom shared with any one. Yet he did not answer, and painted on in silence. At length he said—

"I want advice; will you give it me?"

"If I can," she answered, somewhat wondering.

He drew out the letter he had been considering earlier in the day. "I don't know what to do," he said. "You know the *Cosmopolitan?*" mentioning a leading quarterly review. "Clewer, the editor, wishes to have one or two papers on the

present state of English art by a painter, and he has asked me to write them."

"Oh, I am glad!" she said, warmly; but as she looked at him she added, "Are you not going to do so?"

"That's what I want you to tell me. I don't mind owning I should like to write them. I should do it very badly; but all the same there are two or three things I have thought for a long time, and should like to speak out. One gains so much power speaking through a review like the *Cosmopolitan;* if people do not happen to catch sight of the ass's ears, that is."

"But if you think you may do good, you will write?"

"I'm not such a fool as to fancy my words, printed or not, would have much influence. People will dree their weird to the end of the world; but all the same I should like to 'deliver my testimony.'

'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,' even the vexation of spirit itself."

"Then you will do it?"

"Do you remember," he asked, abruptly, "a talk we had that evening I dined with you—the day the Academy opened—about critics?"

"Yes."

"It has been in my mind while I have been thinking over this. Of course the articles would be anonymous, but it would creep out who wrote them, and I don't know what I could say of Trench's work. I couldn't pass him over. I couldn't praise his earlier pictures without pitching into his later ones. And the things he is doing now, show a worse falling off than ever."

"I know," she said in a low voice, full of pain. "But don't you think it is only, he needs rest?" She looked pleadingly at Max.

"Ay; but how is he to get it, and when? He does want complete rest; and instead of that he has three pictures on the easel, and has taken to portrait painting into the bargain. If he would, he could do more than any man alive, except one."

"I think he will, after all."

"Amen," said Max. Then after a pause, "But as it is, what shall I do?"

Evelyn had not looked at him for some little time. She had a limpet-shell in her hand, and was apparently engrossed in studying its smooth, polished lining, with the streaked ribs and shadings of yellow and brown.

"You do not want to hurt Roland," she said at last.

"I hate the thought of it; and I should feel a sneak as well, doing it without signing my name. He might understand it, he is generous enough; but all the same he

would have a right to be hurt, and I can't afford to run the chance of losing my best friend. I haven't so many."

"Don't," said Evelyn, more impetuously than was her wont. "It is not worth it. Even if he believed it, the hurt to him would be more than the good, and it *would* pain him."

"Thank you," said Breynton. "I thought you would say what you have. I am glad you think so. I wondered if I were a coward to funk it."

CHAPTER VII.

"Ah ! my beloved, fill the cup that clears
To-day of past regrets and future fears :
To-morrow ! Why, to-morrow I may be
Myself, with yesterday's seven thousand years,
Perplex'd no more with human or divine ;
To-morrow's tangles to the winds resign."

Rubaiyat of Omar Rhayyam.

A TENDER, sad, grey day ; the sea and sky meeting in a soft mist at the horizon, and the granite cliffs subdued in tone from the lack of bright sunlight. The smooth, dry, rock turf, slippery as glass from the summer heat, was only a greener shade of the prevailing grey, repeated in the faint beryl lights lying like streaks on the sea. The scene did not gain much charm from colour,

except a certain wild melancholy calm; but it could vindicate its claims to grandeur and beauty without the aid of sunlight and vivid azure waters laughing back the blue of the sky. It was a singularly exquisite line of coast, sweeping round on one side from a noble headland, and curving onward in a strong harmony of great crags crowned with steep slopes of turf, so as to form a bay, beyond which yet other headlands ran into the sea, which leapt against them with "so musical a discord, such sweet thunder," as comes back to our ears with an ever new delight when we hear it again.

Roland Trench, making his way along the path which led along the top of the heights, felt as it were a new life as the sea breeze swept against his face, and this wide wonder of sea and sky satisfied his vision. After a London June, this island seemed a revelation. From the moment, two days

before, when he had awoke on board the Jersey steamer, to find around him the glory of the deep blue sea, dazzling in the morning light, and with the dark masses of the Caskett Rocks, crowned with their white towers, rising in the distance like some enchanted fortress in the midst of the waters, he had enjoyed everything with the keenness and freshness of a boy, joined with the deeper feeling of the exquisiteness of natural beauty which is born out of the battle of life—a pleasure so intense that it quickens into pain. The heavy sweetness of the heliotrope and the June roses as he passed them in the cottage gardens stirred a vibrating delight in him like that of music. The sight of the lush foliage of the lanes, of the tangle of dog-rose and honeysuckle, seemed to make his heart beat faster. His walk from St. Peter's Port had been like passing through the movements of a

symphony, and now it was consummated, and reached its fullest nobleness and beauty in this grand music of coast and sea.

He followed the line of the bay, and found his road led him across a narrow neck of land, thus cutting across the projecting part of the coast. The scenery was slightly different on the other side of the headland. There was a wide stretch of long dry grass, among which shot up tall wild flowers, red poppies and golden coltsfoot, sloping down to the cliff. There was a sense of loneliness in this wide tract of wind-blown grass, scarcely lessened by a solitary figure wandering along it half-way down the slope, the form of a woman, slender and tall, her grey dress softly harmonious, yet thrown out against the differing half tints of sea and sky. She had taken off her hat, and the small head showed in profile like a delicate cameo. Roland recognized her in a moment,

but for the instant she had struck him as a picture, and one which remained long with him. There was a suggestion of a fair forlornness, a grace of wild poetic fancy, in the slight girlish form, surrounded by the waste of air and sky and sea. Then the fancy faded, and she was Eve Goring, whom he hastened down the slope to greet.

"You expected me," he said, when they had mutually expressed surprise.

"Yes, but not till this evening. Papa and Mr. Breynton have gone over to Larée for sketching, and I was so certain you would not come till late, that I started off on a ramble."

"Is it safe for you to be wandering all alone? You looked like one of Mrs. Radcliffe's heroines, when first you dawned upon my sight."

She laughed. "I am so glad you have

come," she said; "but I wish you could have made Gertrude come with you."

"You might as well wish for the immediate company of a star," he said, rather bitterly. "Lady Ranton's theatricals are on the 22nd, and there is a performance at the Polygon for the benefit of the Female Inebriates—I mean of the Home for them —on the 27th, and Gertrude is leading lady in both affairs; so even if there was nothing else to keep her, she couldn't possibly have come. She was glad enough, though, that I should go; thought the change would do me good. I'm in love with your island already, Evelyn. I mean to exercise my marital rights, and drag Gertrude here for a short time, when the season is over. Won't the boy like it? He is growing a regular Tartar, by the way. He stuffed a pillow-case with his various belongings when he saw me packing my portmanteau,

'to come along with dada,' and I left him crying his heart out, poor little chap, at not being allowed to go."

"I wish you could have brought him; but I suppose Gertrude couldn't have spared him."

"He is so much with me now, he feels my going away awfully. Halloo!" as the sketch-book he was carrying fell from under his arm on to the grass, and, it being unfastened, the leaves fluttered freakishly in the wind.

"I may see, may I not?" said Eve, holding out her hand.

"They are scarcely sketches," said Roland—"only notes."

But none the less was Evelyn delighted by the freshness and suggestiveness of these studies, caught in a happy mood under the inspiration of nature's eyes; a red sunset cloud, with the evening light

kissing the calm water below; a spray of honeysuckle; the face of a cottage child, wildly sweet; a heather-crowned cliff; the curve and spray of a leaping wave. The book was a journal of Roland's two days' life in Guernsey. The old delight of beauty filled the sketches with power, and Evelyn's heart grew glad.

"Won't you keep it?" said Roland, as she would have returned the book. "Do!" in the old persuasive tone of his boyish days.

"I can't; you may want them."

"No, thank Heaven, they were done for pleasure, not for use. This is a holiday. Don't you remember the time when I never went out on a day's sketching without the thought of showing you my handiwork afterwards?"

She did not answer, and was rather silent as they walked onward. They

turned as it seemed inland, and walked across a tract of heather-purpled turf, at the end of which ran a road, which they crossed and turned down into what seemed the heart of a Devonshire lane. Along this they held their way till it opened, and through an arch of trees they saw again the slopes of heather and gorse, the granite headlands, and the sea.

"And here is our dwelling," said Evelyn, as they came to an ivy-covered cottage built of stone, and standing back a little way from the road, with a shaded grass plot and a border rich in flowers in front, on the gate of which was written, *Mon Séjour.*

Now and then, later on, Roland Trench found himself looking back with a sigh of longing to his week's holiday at *Mon Séjour.* His life seemed to have gone back some years, and he did little but

rest and enjoy himself. He did not paint anything, except a fitful sketch now and then, and one of Evelyn—taken when she did not know it—reading in the garden, in a white gown, against the background of the tall June lilies, orange and white. He never showed this sketch to any one, but kept it as a slight memory of these few bright days. It was long since he had enjoyed Max's or Mr. Goring's society as he did during his stay at Guernsey. In London it is difficult to enjoy a friendship in practice amidst the crush and hurry of life. Here it was different. Max, who had of late seen less of Roland than he had been used to do, felt the old charm of affection and manner, which years ago had made Roland's presence in his studio such a brightness in his solitary life.

And yet there was a core of mischief growing slowly through these days. Roland

saw that he had always been right; that Max still loved Evelyn; loved her silently, but so passionately, it was hard to believe but that the feeling would win its guerdon at last. "What is it to me?" Trench said to himself, fiercely impatient; but all the same he knew that in Evelyn's presence, the thought of another man's winning her was well nigh unbearable to him.

The life he would never know; he saw it all so plainly. The lovely presence in a life, which should make all things sweet or easy to be borne; the tender lips, the true, deep eyes, the passionate heart, the sweet soul: was it possible, indeed, a man's life should come so near a dream? No, not a dream, a reality; but a reality that he would never know.

Yet he had thought once his own existence would hold all this—the world thought

still that it did. His wife was beautiful, fond and faithful, yet—"God forgive me," he groaned, as Gertrude's face rose before him, "and help us both. We need help."

this afternoon, and Jane forgot to give it you when we came in. I hope it does not matter."

"Sure not to do so," said Roland, carelessly, as he opened it, and tried to read it by the fading light. "I can't see it," he said. "Lend us a match, Max, that's a good fellow."

Breynton handed him his case. Roland struck one, and held the little flickering flame near the paper. As he read it his face changed suddenly, terribly, in the feeble light. Then the slight flame went out.

"What is it, Roland?" said Mr. Goring.

"My boy's very ill," Trench answered in a hoarse, choking voice. "It's dangerous. They want me home at once. I don't know —what time does the boat start?"

"I'll order the dog-cart at six to-morrow morning; that will give you plenty of time.

But I hope it isn't as bad as you fear. What does your wife say?"

"I can't see. Read it, Eve," said Roland, pushing the paper towards her.

Max struck another light, and she read—

"'Hugh very ill; inflammatory croup. Come at once.' It mayn't be so bad," she added. "Gertrude did not say anything about it in her letter you got yesterday, did she?"

"There was a squeezed-up P.S., saying he was rather feverish," answered Roland. "I only saw it afterwards. The worst is, all this time one must lose, whether one will or not, waiting for that confounded boat!"

"For goodness' sake look on the bright side of it, while you can," said Mr. Goring.

"While I can," answered Roland, with a hard laugh. There was water and brandy on the rustic table on which the dessert was

placed. He mixed himself a very stiff glass, and drank it off before he spoke again. Then he added, quite quietly, "I haven't much hope, the boy was always delicate."

His tone, calm as it was, gave Evelyn a thrill of pain; she knew how Roland loved his little son.

When she went upstairs, having said good-night, she sat still in her room, with a brooding fear and ache pressing on her. What would Roland do if he lost his boy? his boy who was so much to him; whose quaint, brave ways, sweet child kisses, loving waywardness, brightened all his life. She could not bear to think of it, or of the suspense and agony of forced delay that she knew must be wringing Roland's heart.

If Hugh died, he would still have his wife. Eve knew that Roland had not found the full comprehension he had hoped for; but surely love is love for evermore, and

the life of husband and wife had linked those two together, so that they would ever be far more to each other than any one else ever could. He would find comfort in time; they would have each other to the end.

She went to the window and looked out. The moon had sunk, and the sea was dark in the starlight. The cruel, tightened feeling of pain for Roland and Gertrude seemed to snap, and tears came, and with them prayer for the little life, that held so much love, to the great mystery of Love Itself.

CHAPTER IX.

"'Tis not a life,
'Tis but a piece of childhood thrown away."
BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER, *Philaster.*

IT was a dreary morning on which Roland crossed to England, a dull leaden sky and drifting rain, that had changed to a settled downpour by the time he reached Southampton, and when he arrived at Waterloo he saw Westminster and the Thames through a mist of rain. A hansom took him quickly to Bolingbroke Road, but the foreboding within him was lost in an utter sickness of heart as the cab stopped, and he noticed no light burning in Gertrude's room.

The door opened; he saw a figure within the hall, his wife; and then he knew all, knew it before he heard her low sobbing cry of misery. She did not look at him as she clung to him, her face hidden, her hands trembling, and all she said was, "Oh, if you had come in time."

He gave a groan. "Come in," she sobbed; "come in." They left the hall, where the maid was crying in a weak, hysterical way, and were alone in the drawing-room, which looked like some ghost of itself, with the flowers about the room and in the fireless hearth drooping and dying for want of water. The dim shaded lamp showed Gertrude's face worn and tear-stained, and Roland's wrung by unutterable pain.

He sat down as stupefied, and she knelt by him. "He was so good," she said, "so dear, and I couldn't bear seeing him in

pain. Oh, Roland, I wanted you so," she ended, with a piteous sobbing cry.

Roland mechanically drew his wife closer to him, but not as though seeking a common consolation, only yielding it. "Gone!" that was the one thought his heart held.

Gone! All that his little son had meant to him. He wanted it, craved for it acheingly even now, for the glad shout of daddy, the patter of the small resolute feet downstairs, sweet as April raindrops; such a void, such a void was left by these. And his boy had suffered, suffered in yielding the slender life which had been so brave, and pure, and gay. The tears felt their way slowly to his eyes with a burning pain.

"Roland, do speak!" his wife implored. He had not as yet said a word.

"When was it?"

"This morning." Then she broke down entirely in a passionate storm of tears. "Oh, love me! love me!" she sobbed. "I am so miserable." He took her to him and soothed her as best he could. He had a curious, dull sense of their griefs being apart from one another, though they were born of one cause; but she, sobbing in his arms, was his wife, and needed comfort. She was changed as he had never seen her, her eyes sunken with watching and tears, her hair rough, her face pale and dragged.

"I wanted you," she said, again and again; and then at last she told him the brief story of how little Hugh had died, Roland's heart quivering at each word that spoke of the pain the child had endured.

So they sat together in that room below the one where the sign of strongest union lay still and quiet, with the tall lily flowers

sleeping on his breast. At last Gertrude fell asleep, wearied out, her head on her husband's shoulder, her hand clasped in his.

Her mother-love had not been as that of some women; but who should weigh it now, and judge it wanting in the moment of her loss? Not her husband, who knew that the union between them was no longer close enough to make strength, that each heart must alone know its own bitterness.

As he sat there, her head on his shoulder, he seemed to see the long unlovely waste of years before them. Life had proved sweet to him with the constant interest, and love, and hope, that Hugh had been to him, even though incompleteness in his aims and Art had stung him with regret. But now, of what avail was anything: even the power of Tintoret himself, in the presence of those still child lips,

of that terrible sweet cold of his dead son? He wondered heavily and vaguely whether he should soon get over it. He had never much pitied his friends who had lost a child, and it seemed their lives did not greatly suffer by the loss. But Hugh had been his only one, his darling—there thought ended in a dull sob.

He did get over it, as the world thought, quickly enough. No one of his friends, except Evelyn Goring, saw much amiss with him in a month or two; but his wife, waking in the night, would find in the dark the place by her side deserted, and hear the measured tread up and down, up and down the room, through the silent hours.

She did not dare speak to him, something withheld her from so doing; yet it puzzled and half angered her, this brooding sorrow, which never sought relief in

words. She did not guess the utter loneliness of her husband—the shadow that chilled his life. She never dreamt she had lost Roland's confidence; still less would she have understood the cause in herself of the sensitive shrinking into his inner self, which grew more and more a habit of Roland's nature.

CHAPTER X.

"*Sir Fretful.*—Zounds, no, Mr. Dangle, don't I tell you these things never fret me in the least?

Dangle.—Nay, I only thought——

Sir Fretful.—And let me tell you, Mr. Dangle, 'tis damned affronting in you to suppose I am hurt when I tell you I am not."—*The Critic*, Act i.

"I WONDER how all the fellows will take it."

Thus meditated to his companion, one of two men, serene in the consciousness of withers unwrung, who were discussing at the "Arts" a paper on the Present of English Art, just published in the new number of the *Cosmopolitan Review*. It was not an essay likely to have a sooth-

ing effect on the nerves or tempers of many gentlemen whose names figured in its pages; but it was no mere paper written with the purpose of indiscriminate slating. Clear, trenchant, and stinging as some of its criticisms were, it was so earnest, so thoughtful, so ennobled by a wide culture, a quick enthusiasm, and appreciation of all good, and written with such a charm of style, as made its censure cutting and its praise pleasant in no small degree.

"Who wrote it?" said a third man, who had just come up, and to whom the second handed the review, pointing to the passage, with the remark, "D——d pleasant for Jones, eh?"

"Can't say. It's either Harding or Breynton, I know, for Clewer told me he meant to ask one of them to do it."

"That doesn't prove either of them did.

It can't be Breynton," added the speaker, as he glanced over the pages. "He'd never have given it to Trench like this. By Jove! it is hard on Trench, though. Justice or not, he might have tempered it with mercy."

"Precious little mercy Trench needs," rejoined the man who had shown him the paper. "He has more commissions than he can carry out, and he has laid on his prices of late. A wigging will do him no harm."

"Whether he needs it or not?" said his companion. "If Breynton did write this, Trench may well cry, 'Save me from my friends.' I'd lay two to one there will be a sweet row between them."

"D——n it," broke in the third of the group, who had not spoken for some time. "Hold your tongues! Don't you see him?"

"He" was Trench, who had just entered the room, and whose eye had fallen on them. He came up.

"Don't be shy," he said, with his accustomed laugh, though with a certain hard strain in it. "I hear I'm awfully slated. Hand over the thing, Baird."

"Haven't you seen it yet?"

"My dear boy, did you think I rushed in and bought a copy instanter? I can't afford to throw away five shillings in that fashion. Let's have a look."

He meant to have his face well under control as he read that part of the review which dealt with his work, but he could not prevent for a moment a slight quiver of lip and eyelid at one passage. Then he laughed, as he laid the book down, easily and unconstrainedly enough.

"They've laid it on pretty thick," he said carelessly. "Every one seems cut up

equally, which would be a comfort, if one cared two straws about it. As it is, I don't suppose it will affect any of us much. It's well done in its way, though. They say Breynton wrote it. I didn't give the old fellow credit for so much gumption, or such study of the Ruskin creed."

He was so easy and untroubled, that Baird, who suffered from a plethora of unsold pictures in his studio, thought bitterly how true it was that nothing succeeds like success, when Trench could afford to laugh with *debonnaire* carelessness at a cutting-up which would have rendered Baird's own food and drink as sand in his mouth for many weeks to come.

But as Roland passed Knightsbridge on his way homeward, about half an hour later, he stopped his hansom at a bookseller's and bought a copy of the *Cosmopolitan*. It was a bitterly cold January evening,

seven months after his boy's death, and the old threads of his and Gertrude's life had been taken up as before. They were dining out this evening with Gertrude's people, and going on afterwards to an "at home." He found his wife sitting by the fire in the drawing-room, tea by her side, and one of French's small salmon-coloured books in her hand, studying, as he knew, a part she was to play in some approaching theatricals. On the writing-table there was a formidable pile of stamped notes in pretty, faint-tinted envelopes, waiting despatch to the post.

"You look rather fagged," she said, as he entered. "Poor old boy! There are two letters for you. Won't you have some tea? It is only just six."

"No, thank you," he answered, as he took a seat and opened his correspondence. "Both from people who want their portraits painted," he said with a yawn. "I know

one, she's rather a pretty woman, and the other is old Lord Eskdale."

"I suppose you will do them?"

"I don't know. If I can find time. "What have you been doing this afternoon?" he added, rather as though he dreaded a remark in answer to his.

"Oh! I have had a tiring day, what with one thing and another; nearly as bad as yours must have been with old Lady Morton sitting to you. You know I sat in the morning to Mr. Dayrell."

"What as now?" asked her husband. "One of Baudelaire's heroines was the last young woman he wished to paint you as,—confound his impudence."

"It is 'Love Lily' this time," said Gertrude. "It really is a very pretty drawing, one of the best things he has done. Well, after that I lunched with mamma, and we talked over Edith's court dress—you know

she is to be presented at the next drawing-room—and mine, and drove to Mrs. White's about them. Then we did some shopping, and looked up the Old Masters, and when I came back I wrote off all those cards before I had my tea. I think we ought to begin our Thursday evenings again, now that people are coming back to town."

"As you like," Roland answered, indifferently. Then he gave her the review. "There's something for you to study," he said, and stood watching her face as she read the part he had pointed out to her.

"What a shame!" was her somewhat naïve and very indignant criticism.

"Why?" asked Roland, drily. "The man has a right to publish his convictions. I thought you had better see it before we go out this evening, as some good-natured friend is sure to sympathize with you

over it. Mind you snub such a person well."

She did not seem to hear him ; she was quite stunned by what she had read. "How dreadful!" she said. "How dare they say such things?"

"They dare a good deal more than this," returned her husband, oddly.

"But it won't make any difference," said Gertrude. "People won't judge your pictures by this man's ideas."

He gave a bitter laugh. "No," he answered. "I am not afraid of that." He know such true criticism would not find many to appreciate its weight or depth.

"Who wrote it?" his wife asked at last.

"I don't know," he answered curtly. He knew if he told her it was set down generally to Max Breynton, she would have abused Max, and Roland felt a

shrinking from that. He did not want to defend Breynton, he was too much angered and pained; but he could not have listened to Gertrude's reproaches of his friend without upholding him. He looked at his wife, and laughed at her dismayed expression.

"All people have not the same unquestioning faith in me that you have, Gertrude, you see."

There was a depth of bitterness in his words she could neither fathom nor feel. She took their simple meaning, and was relieved by finding, as she thought, he attached so little importance to the *Cosmopolitan* critic's blame. She went upstairs to dress, bidding him not be late.

If she had seen him when she had left the room, she might have changed her opinion. He sat where she had left him, his face saddened; the review had hurt him

much more than he owned to himself. It hurt him worst of all to think, what he had so long dreaded, that it was thus Max judged his later pictures. He knew in his inner soul that the charges brought against them, of slightness, lack of passion, haste, and a graceful trick of manner which critics in general termed "Mr. Trench's charm of style," were true.

In his boyhood the fancy had always held him of a Vision of Painters akin to Mrs. Browning's Vision of Poets, and he had tried reverently, at a distance, to be a follower of the august souls of whom the world was not worthy. His struggles might be puerile and weak up the steeps towards those altitudes where they sat crowned and serene upon the mountain peaks above the clouds in God's everlasting sunlight; but he had always refused to judge his work, except the highest standard

of all, accepting failures and shortcomings simply, but never striving to forget and ignore the heights he could not reach, or measuring himself and Art by a lower standard, oblivious of the mighty masters he could not hope to equal.

But now the great brows of the painters of the antique time seemed to have no sympathy with him ; those deep, dreaming, far- and wide-seeing eyes held no feeling with which he could claim kin. Their aims were not as his.

He roused himself with a sigh.

"At all events," he thought, "I won't paint those two portraits. I haven't the time for what I must do, as it is."

The postman's knock came to the door, and the maid brought in three letters for Roland, one from a friend, and two unpleasant looking missives, whose inward character by no means belied their ap-

pearance. One was the bill for Roland's Christmas present to his wife, an antique necklet; and the other was an account from a noted upholsterer for the rehanging of the dining-room walls, which, with its various items of "dado of old Spanish stamped and gilded leather;" "solid oaken doors, panelled and carved architraves," mounted up to a rather formidable sum. "I didn't think of this," he meditated. "I shall have to accept those commissions after all. I must manage to make time. It's always the same story."

"Roland, haven't you gone up to dress yet? Do make haste; we shall be so horribly late."

His wife had come downstairs again, beautiful in heavy, dead, white silk; his gift, the necklet of dead gold set with large dull pearls, was round her neck, and in her hand she held a screen of white ostrich

feathers with long ivory handle. A brown gold orchid blossom was set in her hair. She had never appeared fairer, and as she looked at Roland her tone changed. "I am sure you let that stupid critique worry you," she said. "Don't think about it any more, it isn't worth it, dear."

"You needn't try to comfort your stricken deer, my child," he answered with a slight laugh. "The dart isn't very deep, and the herd won't flee from us on its account. It won't even hurt my dinner."

CHAPTER XI.

"The private wound is deepest."
Two Gentlemen of Verona.

"COME in, whoever you are, the door's unlocked; don't break your shins over the bench, that's all," called out Max Breynton, in answer to a knock at his studio door. He did not, however, turn his face from his work for a minute or two, or cease from a melody he was whistling horribly out of tune, and when he did look round, it was with a stare of unfeigned surprise that he saw his visitor was Roland.

"You here at this time, and on such a

glorious day," he exclaimed. "I thought it was that confounded ass Simpkins, who is always boring me by looking in of a morning, as he calls it, and maundering on by the hour about some new medium or another. I wish he'd stay in his studio and make a practical trial of it. If he can't settle to his work, there's no reason why he should bother decent folks who can."

"Is that a hint for me to make myself scarce?" said Roland, with a rather uneasy laugh.

"Precious likely," was all Max condescended to answer. "I'm glad enough to see you, whatever has brought you here?"

"I can't work," said Roland. "The pipes have burst, the water's come into the studio, there's the devil's own mess, and the plumbers are in there, worse luck. So

I thought I'd drop in and see how you were getting on."

"Oh, you did, did you?" thought Max. "I've known you rather too long, my friend, to be taken in by that. You've got something to say that you don't like saying. I wonder if I know what it is?"

"D——d nuisance they are," he assented to Roland's remark about the plumbers, and then went on painting, while Trench stood watching him moodily enough. Despite what was on his mind, Roland could not help feeling the beauty of his friend's work.

"I haven't seen this before," he said. "For the Academy, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"It was an evening sky and sea, the sun dying redly behind a heavy bank of clouds, while to the right above in the sky hung the moon, gaining brightness as she

rose. Both her reflection and that of the fading day shone in the water, one a faint shimmering quiver of silver light, the other a slumberous crimson glow."

"We saw something like it one evening at Guernsey last year," said Max; "and it was a fancy of Miss Goring's helped me to remember it. It reminded her of Endymion."

"Do you mean to call it so?"

"Yes."

"Not one person in twenty will take it. You'd better stick two lines of Clough's into the catalogue, at all events—

> 'I withdraw into the darkness
> To allure thee into light.'"

"I'm hanged if I do," said Max. "If the thing doesn't tell itself, it isn't worth telling."

The conversation flagged again in a most unaccountable way. At last Max

turned round and looked full at Roland. "Out with it," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"You've a bone to pick with me about something or another, so you may as well have it out at first as last." There was an under look of amusement in Max's eyes, but Roland did not see it.

"I've no right to complain," he began with a certain hesitation, "and you've every right to say what you think."

"Ah, that's it, is it?" said Max to himself. "I thought as much. Well," he said aloud.

"Did you write that paper?"

"What paper?"

"You know well enough: the one in the *Cosmopolitan.* Mind, if you did, I allow you were right to say what seemed good to you; and if you thought I needed slating

—well and good. But you might have told me beforehand."

"I might have," assented Max, in a tone of conviction.

"Then it was you," said Trench. "Well! if you thought it, I am glad to know it, though I would rather not have learnt it like this."

"You think it is down on you too much."

"I think there are parts of it," returned Roland, firing, "that no friend should have written of another. Whether the criticism be just or not, is another matter. It is the tone I complain of—no, I don't complain; but, Max, I should never have done this by you."

The voice touched Max quickly, keenly: it was the voice of the boy who had taken so close a place in his heart years ago. He looked up and saw the face, still beau-

tiful in line, but haggard and careworn, the trouble of the man showing plainly through it. There was a curious quiver of feeling in Breynton's voice as he answered—

"Neither would I by you. Don't excite yourself, old boy, or go and pitch into some other fellow. I never wrote the blessed thing."

"Why the devil, then, did you let me think you did, and make such a confounded ass of myself?" was all Roland condescended to rejoin.

"I wanted to see whether I could have you, and how you'd give it me. Besides, it's a clever thing to be given even the credit of."

"If you didn't write it, you agree with it," said Roland, gloomily.

"If you are bent on a quarrel on that score, I won't baulk you," began Max. Then he saw that this critique had hurt

Roland, or more truly had awakened him to the falling off of his work more than anything had done before; and the quick pity for pain, which was part of Breynton's nature, made him inwardly tender towards Roland, though outwardly his manner remained the same. "I think, on the whole, we've had enough of the matter," he resumed, "so let's dissemble over a drink and the pipe of peace. There's your pet cherry-stick by the side of the mantelpiece. Which will you have, whisky and water or beer?"

"Beer," replied Roland. "I keep spirits for the evening."

"I wonder if you make up for it then," thought Max, as he brought forth the historic pewter, which had been freshly filled just before Roland's entrance. A suspicion had come to Breynton of late, that Roland had fallen into the habit of taking—if

not more, quite as much as was good for him.

Roland's spirits recovered cheerfulness under the soothing influence of his pipe, and Max leaving his work, they idled an hour or so away over the fire, talking of many things, but chiefly "shop."

But Trench, with a jealous fear lest his friend should see how deeply the reviewer's thrusts had touched him, talked in an easy, confident strain of his own work, with an assurance of success very different to his former moods. Max had wit enough to see that this was partly assumed; but all the same, when Roland had gone, he sighed.

"Poor fellow," he thought. "I don't fancy he will ever struggle out of the slough. He seems to have forgotten his old self. 'Oh, the pity of it, Iago, the pity of it!' I'm growing sentimental in my old age."

CHAPTER XII.

"The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made.
Our times are in His hand
Who saith, 'A whole I plann'd;'
Youth shows but half, trust God, see all, nor be afraid."

RABBI BEN EZRA.

"HAPPY returns of the day, Eve, child. There's a bundle for you, though you are growing too old for such vanities. How old are you to-day?"

"Twenty-eight," said Evelyn, as she greeted her father with her morning kiss, and proceeded to unfasten the wrappers of his birthday gift, an Egyptian scarabæus, mounted as a pendant. "Oh, thank you. I wanted one so much."

"Nearly an old maid," was her father's discourteous remark as he chipped the shell of his egg.

"Quite," she answered brightly. "Old maids are born, not made."

"If you mean that for a pun," returned Mr. Goring, "solitary confinement for six months were too small a penalty. I have a great mind not to tell you my news."

"Oh! who were elected last night?"

"Roland Trench; and we actually recognized Breynton's existence, and made him an Associate—at last."

"I don't think he cared much one way or the other," said Evelyn. "But how glad Gertrude will be about Roland—though I think she felt almost sure of it, from what she said to me last night."

"Ah! how did their dinner party go off?"

"Oh! very well. I wish you had been there. Mr. Dayrell took me down."

"Good Lord! ejaculated Mr. Goring. "How you must have enjoyed it. I don't know, though. I believe all you women like him really, whatever you may say."

"Yes, I do," said Evelyn, piquantly. "He was quiet and pleasant, and wasn't ashamed of showing feeling when he talked about things. I much preferred him to Mr. Anley's fellow-member for Haywell, who sat on my other side."

"Rather you than I," returned her father. "How were Roland and his wife?"

"Gertrude looked very well indeed. I think she grows handsomer every year. She said something about coming round here this morning."

"Like Tommy Merton, when he had danced the minuet," said Mr. Goring, "to receive in the sweetest manner the compliments and congratulations of the company —she was never content while her husband

had three letters after his name instead of two."

Evelyn could not help remembering her father's words with a little amusement, when at about twelve o'clock Gertrude made her appearance. It was only to Evelyn and one or two other people Mrs. Trench would allow herself to be frankly expansive on the subject of her husband's election. To the world in general she would affect to take it as Roland's undoubted right, and as a matter of but little consequence; but she really felt in need of some one to sympathize with her in the first flush of exultation, and so had come round to Evelyn.

"I knew they must elect him," she remarked. "And yet it was wonderful, when you think he is only thirty-two."

"Raphael died at thirty-seven," said Evelyn.

"Then he would not have been an R.A. if he had lived in England in our time," returned Gertrude. "But I forgot birthday wishes, Evelyn, and this, that I brought from Roland and myself."

This proved to be a broad band ring of dead gold, set with one large star sapphire; engraved inside were the words, *Elle est vraie.*

"Oh! that was Roland's fancy," said Gertrude, "to have that engraved. I suppose he meant it as a compliment to you."

No compliment, rather the expression of a truth which dwelt deep in his heart.

A curious connection of ideas touched Evelyn at the moment. She remembered how Roland's birthday gift to her this day ten years since had been a small seventeenth century copy of the "Princesse de Cleves," on the end page of which there

was written in faded ink, by some long dead hand, *Elle est vraie*, the words spoken of Madame de la Fayette by Rochefoucauld, the fitting summing up of the author's sweet nature as aptly applied to her work.

Roland had read the simple, deep-reaching story to Evelyn on that morning of her eighteenth birthday, and she remembered across these years how the passion and sweetness and nobility of that tale, clear and lustrous as "one entire and perfect chrysolite," had moved her in her girlhood. There came back to her the unutterable pathos, purity, and grief of Madame de Cleves' confession to her husband; the sad tenderness of her last interview with M. de Nemours, the outcome of the creed of duty, simple, sweet, and austere, which had shielded her gentle womanhood so well. Evelyn remembered

how Roland had said as he ended, and let the book rest open, "That's as fine as the last scene of Minna and Cleveland."

How far one drifts onward in ten years! Evelyn's life had been very quiet; yet, looking back, she wondered to see how little of life's great sea was viewed by her old self, that girl of eighteen, who, standing as it were on the shore, had said in her own soul, like Landor's Gebir, "Is this the mighty ocean? is this all?"

To Gertrude she seemed still only to be looking thoughtfully at the ring, and Mrs. Trench put her arm round Evelyn's neck.

"I wish," she said, half in earnest half in jest, "I could see 'a ring without a posy, and that ring, *yours*.'"

Evelyn turned a slightly startled face towards her. "Why should you?" she said, laughing. "I am very happy as I am."

"You would be happier if you were married."

"It's a dangerous experiment," said Evelyn, with a very quaint smile. "And I don't know any one who would care to try it with me, or whose co-operation would please me in it."

"It is so strange you have never——"

"What?"

"I was going to say, had never cared for any one, but—but I didn't mean to be impertinent, dear."

"I don't suppose every old maid is bound to have suffered from an unrequited attachment," answered Evelyn. She might have defended herself better, but with the ring on her finger, she could not belie its posy, even by a half truth.

"An old maid," repeated Gertrude. "Very likely!"

"Very, indeed," said Eve. "I am train-

ing up a pug in the way it should go, and teaching two kittens, by precept, that cage birds are indigestible."

"You would be a loss to your friends if you married," persisted Gertrude. "But for yourself——"

"I know what is best," answered Evelyn. Then, with a weariness and impatience which always oppressed her when marriage was coarsely or lightly spoken of, she added, "Oh! Gertrude, you, to talk of a marriage without love."

Something in her look and words recalled the more outspoken sweet severity of the Evelyn of eight or ten years ago, before life had taught her gentleness of judgment without robbing her of her clear integrity. It touched Gertrude strangely, with something that for a moment was almost like self-reproach.

She remembered what no one but herself

knew, what even to herself she scarcely avowed, how, when she had first known Evelyn Goring, she had taken an interest in hearing her and Mr. Goring talk of the boy artist, who seemed to have been as a brother to Eve. Gertrude Anley then had wondered whether there had been any different feeling between this Roland Trench and Evelyn; and when she had seen him that first evening in the glimmering firelight, she had drawn her own conclusions.

Another feeling had sprung up within her, even in those few moments. She had never seen a face which had struck her as Roland's had. A keen susceptibility to certain forms of outward beauty was a strong component of Gertrude's nature, and Roland's countenance, "as for to look upon an old romance," touched directly keen instincts of her nature, which if not un-

awakened—that was hardly likely, after a London beauty's experience of six or seven seasons—had never been roused so strongly as they were destined to be now; and that very evening she had gone home with a vague jealousy that Eve, as she felt, was first among women in Roland Trench's eyes.

She had gone to the Fields' "at home" with the hope that she should meet him; not that she was yet in love with him, but the one strong passion in Gertrude's mind was to be first with every one. The idea of a woman friend of hers having another woman friend nearer than herself made her almost unconsciously strive to be first with both of them. It was the same with her friends' men friends; with their lovers also —she must be first, the centre in which all these lives met,—after that, as they pleased.

In her own soul she knew she had drawn Roland on to love her through those summer days; had frequented Fainton Cottage not only on the chance of meeting him, but to prevent his being alone with Evelyn. Gertrude had known that, despite the new power of her own beauty, his near companionship with Evelyn was still a strong and sweet tie, and one he still loved. She was heedless whether Evelyn suffered or not, having indeed but one clear thought in her mind, that Roland Trench should be hers and hers only; the glory of his power, her own to triumph in before the world; the charm of his comeliness, her very own for her treasure and delight. It had all been half-unconscious, even to herself, this steady idea: all she had inwardly owned was that she was, as she said to herself, utterly in love with Roland Trench and that had

been true, as far as it could be with one of her theatrical and self-conscious nature.

But now for one moment, looking into Evelyn's serene eyes, she seemed to find therein a reproach, she knew, Eve herself had never dreamed of. "Why do *you* ask me why I have never married? you, who stole away what was mine by rights."

She had excuses ready enough in her own mind. After all, Roland had loved her alone, not Evelyn. It was absurd to think she ought to have made him unhappy by refusing him for a quixotic scruple as to the possible results of their marriage on Evelyn's peace of mind. Nay, had not events proved that Evelyn's nature was very cold, and that if Roland's marriage had cost her a passing twinge, it had been over long ago.

Mrs. Trench did not know how—after that June evening, seven summers back,

when she had come to tell Evelyn that Roland had asked and won her love—through the long hours of the summer night the moon had shone in cold and clear through the window of Evelyn's room at Fainton Cottage, where a girl's form, still, but for a passing shiver now and then, knelt by the bed with clenched hands pressing the back of her head, and a face white in its dumb abandonment of pain,

She did not know, and what if she had? The dead pain of that night was almost as a dream now to Evelyn herself.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Blest pity! True mother of that graceless scamp, young Love, who is ashamed of his real pedigree, and swears to this day that he is the child of Venus! —the coxcomb."

"Fainton Cottage, March 31st.

"DEAREST EVELYN,

"I am glad you are enjoying your visit at Colethorpe. Do you think Mrs. Trench will let you stay where you are, rather longer than you intended? I am afraid, if you come back, as you say you mean to, on Tuesday, you will have rather a worrying time. You will be surprised to hear that I am doing sick nurse, and you will be

sorry to learn my patient is Breynton, and that he is dangerously ill.

"He came to dinner here on Tuesday, and I thought he seemed very queer, though he said there was nothing the matter. We sat over the fire, chatting, for I don't know how long; but when at last we looked at the time it was two o'clock, raining 'Duke Georges' and not a cab to be had; so I said he had better turn in here. The next morning he was awfully bad, though he still persisted he was all right, and said he should be off in an hour or two. Before half that time I had Lansdell round, who ordered my friend back to bed at once—typhoid—and, he says now, a bad case.

"Now, dear child, don't think of coming back. Breynton is very bad, but I mean to pull him through, please God, and you are better where you are; so don't fash your-

self. Remember me to all at Colethorpe. Roland has looked in every day, since Tuesday, to learn how Breynton is. He tells me Dora thinks of coming up when you do, so that she may go with him and his wife to the Dalrymples' fancy affair.

"I miss your face, dear girl, very much.

"Your loving father,

"E. GORING."

Evelyn's obedient conduct when she received this letter was to go straight to the drawing-room at Colethorpe, where Dora and her mother were sitting, and inform them of its contents.

"Oh, how nice!" said Dora. "I don't mean poor Mr. Breynton being ill, but that we shall keep you here."

"I can't stay," answered Evelyn. "I must go back to-day."

"But, my dear," said Mrs. Trench, "your father says not."

"I must go," Evelyn answered. "It isn't selfish, Aunt Dora," so she always called Mrs. Trench. "I know papa wants me, really."

"I don't know," answered Mrs. Trench, in a puzzled tone. "You are sensible, Evelyn, dear, and not a very young girl now; but I really think you had better stay away. And suppose he died, it would be so very dreadful."

Evelyn could bear it no longer. She only repeated, "I must go, Aunt Dora," and left the room.

She went and stood in the porch, her eyes fixed on the faint flush of an almond-tree, sweet against the pale spring sky. "If he dies, it would be so very dreadful." Ay, indeed; she felt as though something would pass away from the world it would be the poorer for the loss of. And she knew now how strong a

trust she had grown to place in Max Breynton; how much she should feel the loss of what it seemed to her she had scarce valued at all.

Did she love him? The thought flashed to her mind almost with alarm. No, surely not. This was not the feeling she had known once, which she would never know again; and yet it was a sharp personal grief, the thought that Max Breynton might die. She knew what he was. No one held him so truly as did the woman whom he had loved through all these years, who had never loved him; but who, standing there, her eyes looking across to the field where he had told her of his true love's passion, felt a mingled sorrow, regret, and gratitude, which brought the tears to her eyes, as she longed with an involuntary passionate cry of prayer for his life.

"Eve, why did you come?" said her

father, indignantly, when late that evening she arrived home.

Evelyn's kiss was her only answer.

"I'm very glad to see you, my child, for I don't know how things are going on in the house, except in Breynton's room."

"How is he?"

Mr. Goring's face grew grave.

"Very ill," he said; "but we shan't be able to tell for some time yet whether he will pull through or not."

Oh, weary days and weary nights! Eve was very glad she had returned, seeing as she did her father's need of her. She seemed to ache with the strange strain of the very knowledge that in the house there was one fighting between life and death; that in the room she passed so often —her father would not allow her to share the nursing—there lay a man who had

given her the strongest feeling of his life. What had she done to deserve that he should hold her so far above her worth? If he died—she could not bear the thought. Yet sometimes she wondered morbidly how little life seemed to hold for her in the future. Her father!—she clung to him more closely than ever, with that terrible dread of how lonely life might be in some distant time without him.

She was angry with herself for the selfishness of such thoughts, and thrust them from her, when—as they would sometimes—they obtruded themselves upon her, what time she sat in the firelight in the dusk, waiting for her father, who was accustomed at that time to leave Max, and come down to the drawing-room for a cup of tea and an hour's rest; and perchance a little low-toned music, such as would not disturb the patient in his room above.

Oftener she would think, almost with self-reproach, of the love she had never been able to return. If she had done so, would he have been happier than he had been in his lonely life? It seemed so hard that he, who had deserved far more than her weak, foolish self, should have been denied even that.

But Max struggled back to life—to find it seeming fairer than before. Very pleasant were the days of his convalescence at Fainton Cottage in the mild spring weather; but sweetest of all was an indefinable change in Eve's manner. A softer gentleness seemed to cast a halo round her. There was no longer the intangible hardness, which had been born of her desire to give Max no false hope in answer to the pleading she had been wont to read in his eyes. She did not know herself her reserve had melted, but Breynton felt the

change keenly, quickly, exquisitely. It was worth while to have waited seven years; it would be worth while to wait yet another seven, if such reward were to crown all.

And Evelyn was very happy. A woman's natural pleasure in serving made her glad to tend on Max's wants, very glad he was won back from death; and she felt her own life the richer that he lived. Roland Trench, who often dropped in to see Max, bringing him club and Art news, etc., was quick to note the unconscious change, and knew at last there was a chance of Breynton's heart's desire being given unto him. The dawn of a new life seemed to be in Evelyn's eyes, though it was rather the reflection of a coming dawn, which gazers took for the light itself. She did not yet love Max—was further indeed from loving

him than either Roland or Breynton himself thought—but past pity, with gladness and gratitude for the love which had waited so long and humbly and well, were stirring in her heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

"We'll revel it as bravely as the best,
With silken coats and caps and golden rings,
With ruffs and cuffs and farthingales and things,
With scarfs and fans and double change of bravery,
With amber bracelets, beads, and all this knavery."
Taming of the Shrew.

"VERY nice, Eve. What time are the Trenches going to call for you?"

"At eleven," answered Evelyn. "It only wants five minutes to the time."

"Time for this fellow to be off to bed," said Mr. Goring, glancing at Max, who was leaning back in an arm-chair, his eyes fixed on Evelyn in her fancy dress; for she was ready arrayed for the Dalrymples'

ball, to which both her father and Gertrude Trench had urged her to go. It suited her well, her dress, which was simple enough, the white Indian muslin of a Romney picture. Her hair was free from powder, and thrown back from the beautiful forehead. There was no colour in the dress, save a knot of yellow roses at the breast, and something in her sweet, serious grace harmonized well with the attire.

"Miss Milner, I told you to call yourself," said her father. "But you don't look sonsie or wilful enough for the character."

"Or young enough," laughed Evelyn. "Miss Milner was eighteen."

"No fishing for compliments," Mr. Goring answered, as his eyes dwelt on his daughter's face, which had indeed deepened during the ten years of her womanhood, as to have gained more subtlety and strength and sweetness than it had possessed at

eighteen, but which still had the fair serenity of a noble maidenhood as calm and lovely as ever.

"Dorriforth wouldn't let Miss Milner go to masquerades. I forgot that," said Mr. Goring. "How do you like the get-up, Breynton?"

"Better than I thought I should," answered Max. "Just because it isn't a get-up. I fancied," he said, speaking to Evelyn, "I shouldn't like you in any dress but your own; but this seems to be part of yourself."

"It is scarcely a fancy dress," Evelyn answered. "I shall wear it after this. I didn't think I should feel comfortable in any costume so utterly unlike any I had ever worn, that I should continually remember it."

"You've no dramatic instinct, young woman," remarked Mr. Goring. "Here

is one who has," he added to himself, as there was a ring at the front door. He went out into the hall. "Come in and exhibit yourselves," he called, as the door was opened to the occupants of the brougham without.

"Come, Roland," said Gertrude, daintily stepping forth, followed by Dora.

"I won't," returned her husband. "I never felt such a fool in my life."

Nevertheless he was induced to display his gorgeousness, and with his wife and sister made a picturesque group enough against the dark walls of the dining-room. Gertrude had arranged that the three should go as a "Princess" party, and had petitioned Evelyn vainly to appear as Lady Psyche. Mrs. Trench looked wonderfully graceful and statuesque in her rich robings of cream and gold brocade, bordered with brown fur, and sewn with pearls, while

other pearls were twisted in her bright hair; and Dora in a highly idealized college gown, "in colour like the April daffodil," was piquant and pretty enough as Melissa; but Hilarion! Roland Trench's close-fitting dress of a dark cinnamon plush suited him well, and his face showed above it with grace; but there was a deeper sadness in it than Tennyson's prince, who only fought with shadows, knew; and to Max's eyes he was as unlike Hilarion as was his wife to Ida.

However, at the Dalrymples' it was generally agreed that Mr. and Mrs. Trench's were the best chosen and most artistically carried out costumes in the room.

"What a cough you have, Gertrude," said Evelyn, as Mrs. Trench threw off her wraps in the cloak-room before proceeding upstairs.

"Dreadful," Gertrude answered; "but it will go directly I am amused. Dr. Linthorpe didn't want me to come to-night. A very likely thing, after I had got my dress, and persuaded my lord and master to come. Oh, Eve! doesn't he look handsome to-night? It isn't foolish to think there is no one so good-looking? I forget it sometimes, living with him, but at other times it comes back as freshly as ever. I never could have married a plain man."

Roland had something of a corresponding feeling in regard to his wife, when later in the evening she came up to him on Dayrell's arm, that gentleman being garbed as the lutanist, whose story is told in the "Lover's Melancholy," in an exceedingly archaic and unquestionably hideous costume. As Gertrude, in her strange rich dress, turned her face radiant in its full beauty to her husband, he felt it with

something like a new gush of the old delight in her loveliness, which had stirred him in the first summer of their love. "Are you not going to dance with me, Roland?" she said. "Ida and Hilarion must waltz once together."

"A saraband would be more fit," murmured Dayrell.

"And a morris dance fittest of all for you," muttered Roland, as he and his wife moved away. "Oh, noble fool, motley's the only wear. I did not think from the constitution of Dayrell's leg that it was formed under the star of a galliard."

"Nor is it," said Gertrude. "My waltz with him was a penance. Now, Roland, make amends for purgatory," she added, as they slid off into the slow dream of the Manolo, which Roland always averred was the only waltz worth dancing to.

He remembered that dance afterwards:

the dim scent of the hawthorn boughs with which the room was sweet; the sob of the violin, rising like the cry of the wind through the heavy pulsed melody; the whirl of light and colour — and his wife's face lifted to his, "fair, fair," and twice as fair. What matter what life had proved to either of them? He had had her; he had her still. He forgot the weary void that sometimes would ache; forgot all in that strangely renewed sense of her beauty, which held him as with a spell. Life seemed to have retreated as they swam round the room, and as they ended, he still held her to him, wondering to find her so fair.

"Oh, how warm it is!" she said, when the waltz was ended. "I want some air."

She stepped out through a curtained window into a small balcony. Her husband caught her dress.

"Gertrude, come back, child; you will get your death."

"Come and get it with me," she replied, looking back at him, her head a little thrown back, so as to show the grand lines of the throat and neck, her eyes shining, her slow, sweet smile on her lips. "Do come; one can't catch cold on such a night as this."

"Do come in; you should not have done it, Gertrude," he said, but followed her all the same.

"It is as warm as June," she said. "Oh, how refreshing!" "I hadn't an idea how hot that room is."

He put his arm round her, and was startled to find how quickly her heart was beating.

"Do you know your heart is going like a railway train?"

"I should think so," she answered, pant-

ing. "I haven't danced a waltz through like that since I don't know when—yes, I do though. It was when you last condescended to waltz with me; that was a year ago. It will be two years before you do so again, and then I shall be growing a faded old woman."

"Let's have another then," said Roland; "the next."

"And make the whole room laugh at Darby and Joan," replied Gertrude. "No, thanks. Shall we go in? I am cool now."

She did not look so. Her cheeks were burning; her hair was tossed a little more lightly than usual into a shining mist above the brow; her eyes were lustrous, and her red lips parted by the breath, which still came more quickly and heavily than was usual. Her husband suddenly stooped and kissed her. "One born to love you, sweet," was all he said.

"Were you?" she said, clinging to him more tenderly than was her wont, and with a curious look in her eyes. "I am very glad. Oh, Roland, I love you so; I am so proud, when people speak of you, that you are mine, my very own."

CHAPTER XV.

"Sickness' pale hand
Laid hold on thee, e'en in the midst of feasting."
DECKER.

"GOOD-BYE, old fellow. Mind and let us know how you get on at Whitby. Don't flirt with Hild's ghost. Mind, Roland and I shall run up there for a week or so later on, as he proposed."

Breynton's cab was at the door, and Breynton himself, recovered in health, but ordered some weeks of sea air, was standing at the gate of Fainton Cottage, bidding farewell to Mr. Goring and Evelyn, and perusing the latter's face, "as he would draw it."

"You haven't seen anything of him or his wife since that night of the Dalrymples', have you?" said Breynton, in reply to the latter part of Mr. Goring's speech.

"No," answered Evelyn. "I thought Dora, at all events, would have come round to talk it over; but I suppose they are very gay."

"Good-bye," was spoken again, and as the cab with Max in it turned away, he leaned out to catch the last sight of the woman whom, after years of waiting, he at last hoped to call his. She had never looked dearer to his eyes than she did now, standing in the porch, her slight hand keeping back her hair, ruffled by the soft May wind, from her forehead. She meant all to him, and when he came back from his holiday—or banishment—he would tell her so again, and then——He could not

help hoping, with a quick, fresh gladness, he had not known for years.

Evelyn was still standing at the door, though her father had turned inside, when the gate opened, and Dora Trench entered the garden. There was something in her manner differing from her usual bright, idle carelessness, and Evelyn, as she kissed her, asked involuntarily, "What is the matter, dear?"

"Gertrude is ill," said Dora, as they turned into the drawing-room. "She caught a chill that night at the Dalrymples', and she has inflammation of the lungs."

"Dora!"

"She is very ill, I am afraid," said the girl, with a quiver in her voice. "She looks so strange, and Roland is so wretched. I can't bear to leave him, though I am no good. Mrs. Anley is there, and Edith Anley comes in and out, and Roland says

it isn't good for me to be there, and wants me to go back home this afternoon."

"But I don't understand. Is Gertrude so ill?"

"I think she will—die," said Dora, breaking suddenly down in a fit of sobbing, which Evelyn saw was the result of an over strain. A sudden pang shot through Eve's own heart. Die! That beautiful bright creature, whose whole life had seemed a triumph.

Oh! it could not be true, she thought, as Dora leant on her, sobbing heavily. "Dora," she said, imploringly, "is it so very bad? is she really so ill?"

"Yes," answered Dora. "I know they all think so, though they are afraid to tell Roland. You know how Mrs. Anley always manages everything and everybody —except poor Gertrude herself; but I can see she can't bear to make Roland more

unhappy than he is. Oh, Eve! he looks so miserable, worn, and haggard, and with his eyes as though no one understood him. Sometimes, when Gertrude is dozing, he goes downstairs and tries to paint; but yesterday I didn't know he was in the studio, and was going in, when I saw him there. He wasn't working, only sitting by the easel, his head on his hands. What will he do if she dies?"

Ah! what indeed? Evelyn remembered him that night of the day when he had told Gertrude Anley of his love. She saw him, as he stood in the hall, the light of the lamp falling on his face, itself illumed by the brightness of the new love-joy which shone in his eyes and curved his lips' smile. What would he do if his wife, who had realized all his boyhood's dreams, his man's desire of fairness, died, and left him thus? Evelyn forgot the doubts of Roland's

happiness which had sometimes troubled her mind: she only remembered that new gladness and light which had transfigured his face that evening when he reproached her that she had not yet wished him joy that Gertrude was to be his wife.

And Evelyn Goring had held herself apart from knowing any imperfections in Roland's married life. True, she had seen, with only too much pain, the falling off in his work, the whirl of his life; but she shrank from believing her father in the right when, as had now and then been the case, he would speak bitterly of Gertrude as entirely or chiefly to blame for this. She loved Gertrude with a gentle, strong tenderness, partly born of a long past battle with herself; and she knew Roland loved his wife, and that her loss would rend his life sorely.

So, though she tried to cheer Dora to

hope that all would be well, a heavy load of foreboding pain lay on her own heart, and she had seldom yearned for anything with all the strength of her soul as she did that Gertrude Trench's life might be spared.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Cover her face, mine eyes dazzle—she died young."
DUCHESS OF MALFI.

"ROLAND!" in a faint voice.

"Yes, my child."

"You must be tired," said Gertrude very slowly between her panting gasps of pain. "Go down-stairs a little, mamma will stay with me."

For all her weakness, she spoke determinately, and Roland knew she would not bear contradiction.

She left the room, where Mrs. Anley sat by the daughter, of whose grace she had been so proud, and wandered rest-

lessly, vacantly, into the studio, dim in the fading light of the May evening. There he stood, surrounded by all the quaintnesses of bric-à-brac, carved wood, strange-hued drapery, mingled with the richer tints of Eastern pottery and beaten brass; all the things Gertrude had liked so well, half for themselves, half as forming good backgrounds for herself. All around him his work faced him, though he scarcely saw it—pale, ghost-like faces of portraits, grey in the twilight; vague fancies half realized; the unfinished large picture he was working at—all seemed shadows. Only one thing was strangely, painfully real; a large fan of Gertrude's she had left there the last day she had been downstairs: it lay there, a sign of a life which seemed already closing into the past.

She was very ill, so the doctors said. The short, sharp illness had changed her,

as she lay on her bed upstairs, her eyes wild and bright with fever, and her hot, dry lips parted with the pain of the laboured breath, each gasp stabbing her like a knife. And now Roland stood face to face with the fact that most probably the present course of his life was near an end: from thence its road would be different, and seeing this, he only knew it would be strange, and changed, and lonely.

This filled his heart and soul; yet his brain seemed to work separately and on another train of thought, curiously dwelling on the faults of his work. What set it in motion it is difficult to say; perhaps in the fading light an ill-drawn arm, a weakly conceived idea had caught, half unconsciously, his eye. Dimly, he thought to himself, that if Gertrude lived, he would yet do something which should make her

very proud with good cause. Poor child! She always believed in him, whatever he did; he would justify her faith by a strong, daring effort, that all the world, and those few who are above the world, should recognize as very good.

A sudden, sharp sound, something between a groan and a cry, broke from him, as he realized how little chance there was of her bright head ever leaning against his again in that room, or that long white hand holding back the heavy draperies that hid the door, as she passed in or out.

So he sat there, as it grew very dark. He did not know how late it was when Mrs. Anley came into the room with a light. "She wants you now, Roland," she said. "I am going to bed. You would wake me if—— But she seems breathing more quietly; I think she is a little better, and we may keep her yet."

He rose hopelessly, listlessly; hope seemed to have left him with the dead day.

"You will call me if you see any change," whispered Mrs. Anley, outside Gertrude's door.

He assented silently. She saw the dull, weary sadness of his face, and it touched her; she kissed his forehead, as though he had been in truth her son.

"Oh, my poor boy!" she sobbed. "You and I want her so."

Gertrude looked up from under her heavy eyelids when her husband entered, but she could not bear any one to sit very near her; and so, having dismissed the nurse, he sat silent by the dim shaded light till she fell asleep. He looked at her from where he sat, and strove, with an odd feeling of lack of comprehension, to realize how near Death stood.

He tried to read, careless what book it was he took from the small hanging shelf near. Even as he read it, he scarcely knew the words, familiar though they were, but read them mechanically, without attaching any meaning to them. Suddenly he woke to a sense of them.

"Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal, yet do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair."

It seemed unreal, ghostly, unnatural, the sweet melody, the vague, sweet thought, enfolded in sweetest words, of the poetry he yet loved with all his heart. He read it over and over again, in a dull senseless manner, and to the end of his life those verses will have a strange memory in them of that vigil by his dying wife.

He lay the book down, and the heavy hours crept on, till at last Gertrude woke.

Woke with a start and shiver, a new, fearful terror in her eyes, a strange agonized appeal to her husband in the look, which struck to his soul with the sense of its meaning—and what help could he give?

She seemed striving to speak, and at last, as he bent over her, one word came hoarsely, terribly, with the haste that knows life slipping, slipping in spite of a desperate clinging grasp to it. "Brandy."

It was ready mixed with water on the table by her side. He gave it her. She clutched the glass in her own trembling hand, and would not let him hold it; but she could not swallow, though she tried with an eagerness terrible to see. When she saw the effort was vain, she shook her head, and pointed to a handkerchief near at hand. Roland understood, and dipped it in the brandy and water. She sucked it eagerly, but it gave her little strength,

only such as found vent in one word, "Roland!" It held so much, that cry; love, piteously entreating help in that last, dreadful, lonely hour.

His arms were round her, and for one moment she lay silent and still; then her husband felt her whole frame quiver, and there came from her, clear and awful in the darkened room, the words—"Dead—dead!"

She fell back, her arms outspread as though asking help, her eyes wide and imploring, the red flush still lingering on her cheek. So they were there; those two no longer joined, severed by that impassable gulf, even while the beauty which had first astonished his eyes was warm and sweet in death, as it had been when he had first seen her; and yet——Oh, the pity of it! the pity of the work of that wedded life, which might have been so fair, that its

memory, even in this hour of loss, might have sufficed to make the man kneeling there thank God that the earth had held so fair a joy, and wait and work through the remaining years for the moment when, through the clouds of death, he should see his wife's eyes again.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Schweig stille, mein Herz, schweig still."
SCHÖNE ROHTRAUT.

IT was nearly nine o'clock on an evening at the end of July, about two months after Gertrude's death, that Max Breynton, who had the day before returned to London, found himself standing at the door of Roland's house. The evening was sultry and lowering, with thunder in the air, and the small dusty lime-trees along the pavement seemed parched by the heat. Nearly all the houses in Bolingbroke Road were shut up; for the season had ended

early this year, and there was a sense of forlornness about Trench's house which Max felt as the door was opened and showed the hall in the darkening light.

Roland was in the dining-room. He heard Max's voice in the hall, and went out to meet him. "How good of you, old fellow, to look me up," was his greeting, and there was something in his tone which showed gladness at not being left any longer to his own thoughts.

"I only got back yesterday," said Max.

"How are you? all right again? you look so."

"More than you do," thought Breynton, as he noted the strained, weary unrest of his friend's face. "I thought I would come round on the chance of your being in," was all he replied.

"Why the devil, though, didn't you come to dinner? Never mind, come into the

den. All the house is dreary enough, but this part is the dreariest," glancing at the dim glimpse of the drawing-room seen through the open door.

In truth Max, too, felt the ghostly memory of a woman's presence throughout the house. It had always been far more Gertrude's than Roland's, and so now that she was dead the rooms seemed to have lost their meaning. A man did not feel this as quickly as a woman would have done. Even Roland did not understand the sick pain which filled Mrs. Anley's heart, reserved woman as she was, when her eyes fell on Gertrude's pet vases or favourite china ; or the sudden revulsion and burst of passionate grief which had seized her when she had come on the dress her dead daughter had worn at the Dalrymples' ball, with all the rich folds and quaint ornament, the details of which

Gertrude had discussed beforehand with her.

There was less of Gertrude in the smoking-room than in any other of the house, though a water-colour sketch of her by her husband's hand smiled dreamily above the oaken mantelshelf. Max's eyes fell on it, but he instinctively turned them away. Roland however had seen the glance, and he made a remark on some other matter. Breynton saw he had a morbid dread of speaking of his wife, and fell in with the mood gladly enough.

"Do you mean to stay here through the autumn?" asked Max, at last.

Roland knocked the ashes of his pipe out, and began refilling it slowly before he answered.

"No, I am going away—abroad, for a year or so."

"A year!"

"I can't stay here," said Roland, rising, and walking up and down the room. "I can't paint; I loathe my work. I feel like a bow with a snapped string. I can't settle to anything, and I long to get away, anywhere out of this confounded town, and away from the people who know all about me, and will talk to me, d—— them! You are the first person—except Goring and Evelyn—who has left me to myself, and not forced me to speak what means nothing. What good are words? I'm going away, to get free from it all. I don't know where I shall go yet; but I don't want to paint, but to rest and be idle. I shall wander at my own sweet will,"—his laugh was rather hard,—"and see things as one does when one thinks of them, not as one does tearing from place to place. See them as I did in my three years at Rome."

"You'll be clever if you do," said Max,

doubtfully, and taken aback, he could not have told why. "You can't put yourself back to one and twenty."

"No," answered Roland. "But life may be worth looking at still, and mean more to one than it did as a boy."

"To you?" asked Max, astonished and involuntarily.

"Yes," answered Roland, uneasily, and with some embarrassment. "Why not? No life ends with a grief."

This calm philosophy was too much for Max's understanding. "I'm not sentimental," he said, "but life must hold promise to make it worth much. When that is gone, one drags on—the deuce knows how."

Roland was still pacing up and down the room, and his face was turned from Max—there was a singular conflict in it. Pride, regret, something like shame, strug-

gling for mastery with a fixed resolve, and so preventing him from saying what he wished to speak, but scarce knew how. Through the years his subtle secret jealousy of Max had grown and grown, and now it leapt to light, fierce, selfish, resolute, filling his brain and nerving the words, which yet came slowly.

"And my life does hold a promise—at least, a hope."

Max made no answer: he was too much at a loss to comprehend the meaning of the words.

Roland turned and stood by the mantelpiece in his old way, his arm on the shelf, his hand drooping over it, strong, nervous, beautiful as that of the Jason; and the other hand pushing off the hair from the forehead, a trick he had had from boyhood, especially when he was doubtful or embarrassed how to say what he wished.

The action, the manner, the look, brought the old Roland back to Max. Breynton understood that the man's dreary aching for the banished presence of his life found no relief in words, and he wished in his very soul he could give him help.

"What is the use," said Roland, suddenly, "of turning and twisting about to say what I mean? You are the only one, old fellow, who would understand—though if I were not leaving England so soon, I should not tell you. If I told any one else, man or woman, that now, two months after my wife's death, I feel another life possible—a life I had fancied before I ever saw her dear face—they would think me an utter brute, or at least a stone. And yet, God knows, I loved her; that I love her still; that if I saw her now come back, it would be enough to fill life. I've wanted her only too much."

A foreknowledge of what was coming made Max's heart stand still for a moment. He smoked on in silence, quietly enough.

"I don't know," Roland went on; "I can say nothing till I come back from my wanderings; but then I am not like you, Max; I cannot live in this lonely way. It gives me the horrors, this looking up to see a face, and finding none; or almost speaking, and then remembering there is no one to answer. Weak enough? I am weak; but I need what I have lost."

"Not what you have lost," thought Breynton, very bitterly; "that which you might have chosen and did not—which you have never known. Do you think you can know it now?" Still he did not speak.

"But there is only one," said Roland —his eyes scanned Max's face quickly, eagerly, furtively, but saw no change of

expression — "who can alter my life. Years ago I thought—perhaps I was a fool; but one thing I know, there is one woman all my thoughts turn to—you know whom."

"Yes," answered Breynton, looking at him fully and steadily. "You mean when you come back to England you will ask Miss Goring to marry you?"

It was more an affirmative sound than a "yes" that escaped Roland's lips. He could not meet Breynton's grave, honest eyes, that plainly spoke the thought, "You have told me this to handicap me, and prevent my asking her before you are free to do so yourself."

In his own mind Max pondered, "Shall I speak out and tell him what he already knows, what she is to me? or—— Oh, d—— it, I don't seem able to take anything in. I must be by myself to understand it all."

He rose. "Good-night, old fellow," he said. "I must be off now, it's past twelve." Roland did not say anything; both men had read between the lines of the other's speech; but Trench knew he had sown his seed.

He knew, too, that with most men the fruit in such a case as Max's would be, they would at once strain every nerve to gain Evelyn for themselves. With Max, how would it be? Roland could not understand his friend's nature fully, yet he felt instinctively he had done the wisest thing for his own cause in telling him. The wisest? Yes; yet a thing which the boy Roland Trench, who had pleaded for Evelyn's love ten years before, would have scorned utterly.

He left for France a fortnight later; ashamed of himself, yet more jealous and angry that he should leave Max with the chance he himself could not use.

CHAPTER XVII.

"I love thee so, dear, that I only can leave thee."
MRS. BROWNING.

MAX went out into the dark, a great passion at his heart. A passion he scarce knew of what; the tumult of feelings thronged so fast within him he could not distinguish them. He walked on through the summer night, and as he wandered onward he began slowly to realize what he felt.

Burning anger was the first full sense that filled him; angry, aggrieved indignation against Roland. Had he waited patiently, resolutely, all these years, with

one object in his mind only, that now Roland, who had spoilt for no use of his own the gladness of Evelyn's girlhood, who had been heedless when she had given him the fresh, passionate tenderness of her sweet heart, should think so assuredly that he could yet ask her to yield her life and herself to him? She, whom Max had loved and reverenced; love growing more each day, till now it seemed to him life were but a mockery of itself apart from her.

What made the difference between him and Roland? He wondered that the latter could take so easily what seemed to him as deep as death or life. There was a difference, and Max knew it, even while he rebelled against it: this seeming injustice of nature. In Roland's look, in the tone of his voice, in himself, there was a "prone and speechless dialect," such

as moved women, towards which the woman nature swayed unconsciously, as a flower sways in the sun-warmed breeze: this was his birthright. There was no arrogance, thought Max, in Trench's speaking so easily of asking Evelyn to open again to him the gates of her heart, and letting him rule therein. But Max himself was fashioned differently. No woman's love would come to him naturally in answer to his own, like the gentle rain from heaven upon the earth beneath. He must win it, if he were to win it, by his own strength; prove himself worthy of the guerdon, fit for the trust, it might even be with his heart's blood, before love would spring forth to meet his. He had thought he had done so at last; that his toil was near meeting its reward.

And so it should be. Why should the selfish desire of a man, who had already

made one trial in life, and failed to secure happiness, make him, Max, pause even for a moment to hold back from his sweet prize: his prize well won, to be cherished as its worth deserved? A short, scornful laugh escaped his lips at even the idea of refraining from what had dwelt with him in his thought so long.

He would ask her to-morrow. He wished he had not funked telling Roland the truth; it would have been fairer to him, poor fellow, and he hated the feeling of sneaking in the matter.

The night was wearing on to morning. Somehow his road had led him by Fainton Cottage, and as he passed he looked up. All was dark and silent; there was no wind to make a whisper in the foliage, or stir the ivy round the windows. As he paused for a moment, the full sense of all his love rushed on him, and strangely, as a star

shining fixed, behind and beyond wind-swept clouds, shone the thought of Evelyn herself. How would she be most happy? It was not a matter of Roland or himself, but which way would her life best be perfected?

The answer rose to his mind at once. With him. With him, who had loved her when Roland never thought of her. It was best for her, as best—oh, most best! for himself, and yet a cold sick doubt seemed to strike across his warmth—the shadow of the end.

He would not give her up; at least he had a right to try his fate. If she felt she did not care enough for him, she would refuse him, as she had done before. Roland and he might both have their chances, but his came first.

So he pondered; fiercely, tensely bent on his own will, and ever justifying it by

some new argument to himself; yet slowly, but ever clearer, through each, grew the knowledge, bitter and intolerable, that if he loved Evelyn better than himself—poor form of words so often profaned—he would stand aside.

He had grown to know Evelyn very well since the time he had asked her to be his wife; his eyes read her nature by the strength of love, better even than he himself knew. He had always felt that, if she gave him what he asked, her feeling for him would not be that which she had yielded to Roland, but different in kind. Which was the true love of her life, denied and conquered, because she had known that, left free, there would have been no measure to its strength? Max knew he never could fill her life as Roland had once done. Let her love him as she would as a wife, sweetly, faithfully, deeply, she

could never look back to her feeling for him as part of the budding summer of her womanhood, the deepest note of that choral song of youth, which sang the beauty of the world!

But was not this old love dead from long repression? Had it not died long ago? Max would have given much could he honestly have believed it was so; but in his soul of souls he knew Evelyn's quiet strength, sufficient in itself, had found in past days, all her life's need in Roland. In his soul he knew that, let her learn Roland had want of her, the old feeling, no longer held under by duty, would grow strong and beautiful again.

> "Love once begun can never end,
> Love one, and love no more."

Were the old lines true, if only true with few women, and with fewer men? Were they true with Evelyn Goring? Unwil-

lingly, slowly, out of the depth of an infinite pain, Max answered—Yes.

Yet he could not give her up; he could not yield his dear hope and go back to the old grey life. He would make her happy. Oh, God, he would make her happy! but it must be in his own way.

So his passions wrestled with him through the night, which was growing clear when he reached home. He did not feel as though he could go in, with this restless conflict within him, so passed on, and went northwards, not much knowing or caring whither his feet led him. As the summer dawn grew faintly grey through the darkness, he walked under the great elms of Belsize Lane, the pain ever deeper in his heart, as the passion sank lower and lower in subsiding waves, and he saw the right.

Happy in his way! What love was

his? he thought, as the dim dawn broke slow and sweet over the silent earth. "Men have died and worms have eaten them, but not for love." It was not much to hold back—better so, than ever see an ache in her gaze, and know that this selfishness had brought it there. It was not much to be contented, if she were again happy as he had seen her once, with the old glad light of serene love making her fair eyes fairer still. If they had once shone so for him! Involuntarily his hands clenched, and there came one low groan in the silence.

"I'm a poor devil, my dear," he thought; "but this I can do for you, let you choose for yourself; not make you promise in the dark."

All round him stretched the wide sweeps of Hampstead Heath, cool and fresh in the dawning; and the morning

light was flooding the sky with mother-o'-pearl tints, changing, fleeting, exquisite. "Night's candles were burnt out," and with them the fevered thoughts, the strong hope, which had filled the man's heart, the mad anger which had burnt in his brain. Only a weary sadness of loneliness filled both heart and brain now; they, and the vision of a girl seen long since for the first time, a girl, with sweet, true eyes, clad in a bronze dress, with golden daffodils at her throat and in her hair.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"It is not that I love you less
Than when before your feet I lay,
But to prevent the sad increase
Of hopeless love I keep away."

WALLER, *The Self-Banished.*

"YOU'RE a nice fellow, to have been a whole week in town, and never have come near us."

So, Mr. Goring to Breynton, on meeting him at "The Arts."

Max looked, as he felt, horribly guilty. His companion so very seldom put in an appearance at that club, that he had thought himself free from any risk of meeting him. He could not say, "I love

your daughter, and so am keeping away from her, lest by chance this should escape me; and all through these days I have been thinking of nothing but how to avoid her, and longing for nothing but to see her face."

"I know I'm an ungrateful brute," he said, "or must seem one; but I've been thinking out my plans."

"Plans! The world is coming to an end, when you have plans."

"I'm going abroad."

"The devil!"

"He won't prevent me."

"The whole world is going abroad, I believe," rejoined Mr. Goring, despondingly. "Here's Trench, poor fellow, starting on an indefinite, sentimental journey; but I didn't think it of you, Breynton, that you too would leave me to smoke my evening pipe alone."

"You have Miss Goring," said Max, making an effort to speak her name.

"She doesn't smoke—it's her one fault," returned her father. "But you might have some pity on her at least, and save her from always bearing my company, and listening to my grumbles. Go thy ways, there is no such thing as friendship known to this generation; but why the deuce, a discreet gentleman like you, one that is an A.R.A., and hath two cloaks and everything handsome about him—or might have, if he would"—as Max, with a gravely appreciative air, glanced at his awfully shabby shooting coat — "should wander over Europe like a moon-struck youth!"

"Who told you, I was going to wander over Europe?" put in Max. "I strike my tent further afield—the tropics."

"The moon?" inquired his friend,

blandly, staring at Max as he spoke, and wondering to himself, "Is the fellow mad? There's something under this. What's up, I wonder?"

"Not this time. I'm content to worship Mumbo Jumbo in the mountains of that name."

"'You will wed some savage woman; nay, you'll wed at least a dozen.'"

"I say, what's that?" said another man coming up.

"Breynton's off to Timbuctoo, that's all."

"Whew! What's the matter, old fellow? Crossed in love? You're too tough."

"Likely," said Max, "as much as you yourself, Dick." The tone was easy enough, yet all the same the idea had flashed on Mr. Goring's mind—not the whole truth, but part of it. "If so, why don't he stay and ask her? or has he

asked her and she refused him? or am I an old fool for getting such a notion into my head?" It puzzled him completely. He thought better of Breynton, than to imagine that at forty-three, the mere fact of a woman's denial would make him leave England, like a love-crossed boy of the Byronic type, who thinks that in changing the sky one changes the mind, and who, in so thinking, is right as regards his own case.

Goring could not know that, strong man as Breynton was, he was not strong enough to bear, as he must have had he stayed in England, the frequent influence of Evelyn's presence, feeling it was in his power to win her, and yet putting such a constraint on himself as never to show his love by word or look or sign. Max could not do this. He felt he was cowardly and foolish in leaving England, but it was the simplest,

easiest way, and the kindest and truest to her. He had never known how strong his love was, and must remain, till within these last few days; and at the same time, more and more clearly through his pain, he learnt the truth—

> "Good love, ill placed, is better for a man
> Than if he loved ill what deserved love well."

Better for a woman, too. Max was not conceited; he believed entirely Roland to be a better fate for a woman than he himself, and nearly all the world would have believed as he did. But had it been otherwise, had the balance turned in his own favour, he knew it would still have been better for a woman like Evelyn to marry the man whom she had loved, whom he felt she would love again with all her nature, than him, whom, at the best, she could but learn to love now. Roland had had all the thoughts, the passion and

tenderness of her heart. As for Max, he had neither part nor lot in this matter; only—he had loved her so. God help him! he would love her still, and approve his love to God alone.

So this resolve to leave England for a while had taken root in his mind, and he had already begun to arrange matters towards that end. The reason he gave was that he thought the tropics needed a painter, and must put up with him in default of a better. He was set on making a trial.

"Do you think you'll learn them enough to paint them in a year or two?" growled Mr. Goring. "There! it's too late for me to talk at you any longer to-night; come to dinner to-morrow."

Max could not well refuse, he must have seemed sufficiently bearish and ungrateful already. He could see her when her

father was in the room, without being too sorely tempted from his silence.

Yet sometimes it was hard. The Gorings stayed in town that August. At the beginning of September Evelyn was going down to Colethorpe, and before she returned Max would have sailed for that world of shining sapphire skies and lucent seas, deep-leaved tamarind groves and mighty mountains, of which Evelyn had had a glimpse in returning from Australia. She would speak of it sometimes to Max when they sat by the drawing-room window in the fading light, and would enter so entirely into the feeling which she thought led him there, the wish to interpret these fair dreams of Nature, which have scarcely yet spoken to us through Art, that sometimes Max longed to say roughly, almost fiercely, "I care for none of these things; I only care for you. Have you known me so little

that you can think that all this would weigh with me as a straw, if I could tell you what I told you once, when you would not hear ?"

And she, on her part, was puzzled, as she well might be, at his sudden fancy of leaving England and at his never speaking, till she thought that she had misinterpreted the look which had dwelt in his face during the time of his convalescence in the spring. She imagined he was cured of his feeling for her, and her woman pride rose up angry that she should have been wondering if her life at last held the bud of an answering feeling. So the bud died, and the old frank friendliness bloomed anew, She was glad Max was cured; glad that the troubled question in her life was thus solved for her. Her life would be sober, perhaps sad, as the years crept on, but better loneliness than giving little for

much, and being haunted by a self-accusing dreary regret.

It was the evening before the day Evelyn was going down to Colethorpe, and Max was at Fainton Cottage for the last time with her before he left England. Mr. Goring had been called out into the small library by "some one on business," and Evelyn, at Max's own request, was at the piano. He felt as though he could not bear to hear her speak.

She very seldom sang now, and he had only thought she would play, but as she let her fingers rest on the keys for a moment, something made her commence the low waves of Bach's first prelude, and she sang Gounod's "Meditation." As the last note of that cry to the "Ewig Weibliche" died away, they were both silent.

"It wants the violin," she said at last.

"Does it?" he answered. "I did not know if——"

He rose restlessly and came to the piano.

"What does it mean?" he said. "You know I never understand music. Can you tell me?"

"Do you mean it signifies nothing to you?"

"No—all. All that I have wanted all my life."

"What we all want, I suppose," she said, "or ought to."

"No, the Ave Maria cannot mean to women what it does to men." For a moment all the blood rushed to his head, a wild madness to his heart. Let him tell her all this once. He was silent, from the war of passion within him. She did not understand; yet in the dim light she felt herself shake with a strange reflected emotion she could not account for. So for a little while neither spoke. Max dared not, lest he should betray himself.

"What were you thinking of?" he said at last.

She answered straight from her thought, "Of Dante's 'Behold, even I, even I am Beatrice.' The song made me remember it."

"Yes," he answered. "And of 'his eyes' ten years' thirst.'" His tone was strange, eager, yet constrained. Then he laughed. "You are making me quote poetry," he said; "you and the music together. 'We know what we are, but we know not what we may be.'" He walked across the room and stared out of the open window into the dark.

Evelyn felt nervous, not knowing how to read his manner. She remembered one other time when he had quoted poetry to her. Did he still care for her after all? If so, why did he not tell her? But she hoped not, for she no longer felt she could say Yes.

When he turned to her again, the look of his face was changed, but that she could not see, for they were standing up, and both their heads were above the level of the shaded lamp.

"You have been very good to me," he said simply, "all this time I have known you. I should like to thank you, but how can I? I don't know how."

She put out both her hands impulsively, as though deprecating, yet both receiving and rendering thanks. He took them in his with a close grasp. "I shall see you again," he said, stupidly, "when I come back—two years at the latest."

"Roland will have had his chance in a year," he thought. "And—— She will marry him."

Then Mr. Goring came in, and he was not alone with her again.

CHAPTER XIX.

"I took you—how could I otherwise?—
For a world to me, and more
For all, love greetens and glorifies,
Till God's aglow to the loving eyes
In what was mere earth before.

* * * * *

"And such as you were I took you for mine,
Did you not find me yours?
To watch the olive and wait the vine,
And wonder when rivers of oil and wine
Would flow as the Book assures."

James Lee's Wife.

THE months went on, fading from summer into autumn, freezing into winter, budding into spring again. A certain shade had fallen on Evelyn. It might have been only the fore-falling shadow of dying youth,

for, for all the self-discipline of her quiet acceptance of the life which had been hers, there would still be now and then a longing that years should not always pass so quietly to the end as hers had done. Surely there were wider lives, sweeter joys, higher hopes, more passionate endeavours; yes, and a waste of sin and sorrow, of which she only thought. Had she been selfish in her calm existence? she wondered to herself.

Others could have answered that question for her. Her father, whose life had been gladdened by the blossom of her womanhood; old friends of her dead mother, women, whose solitary maiden lives passed into a lonely autumn, were brightened by the affection of the girl who from her early youth had felt their friendship an honour to her; girls younger than herself, who clung to her with eager, exalting, humble love; children, who read the

mother-nature in her eyes, and found her a rare playmate. She had lived so much in other peoples' lives, that her own was bright; and she rebuked herself for the natural yearnings which now and then would come like an echo from the old time of her early womanhood.

She did not know how one heart held her, the heart of the man who had told her she had been very good to him, who had left England for her sake; and who, as the months dragged on, waited there far off, beneath those tropical skies, with a longing for and fear of the news, which, when it came, would be as a death-knell to the vague hope that, in spite of himself, still lingered within him.

More than a year had gone by since Gertrude died, but Evelyn never passed the shut-up house in Bolingbroke Road, by which her way often led her, without

thinking with an aching pity of the life which had ended in the very flush and prime of its June; of that other lonely life, which was holding its grief apart from the world, or striving to forget.

No one had heard very much from Roland since he had left England. His letters home to his people had been short and not very interesting, and he had apologised in one for its jejuneness, saying he had passed the guide-book time of letter writing. His last had been written a month before, and dated from Algeria, and in it he had spoken vaguely of returning. Evelyn had learnt this in a rambling epistle from Dora she had received this morning; and as she passed the house in the June afternoon she glanced up. The blinds of one room were drawn up, and she fancied she saw a figure move behind the glass. "It must be a workman," she thought,

when the front door was flung open, and in another moment Roland Trench was holding her hands with his old eagerness of greeting."

"I saw you at the window," he said, "and dashed out, Eve."

"Roland!" she almost gasped with surprise.

"Yes; not my ghost. I don't look much like one, do I?"

"No, you are very brown," said Eve. "You look the character of the wanderer returned entirely."

He laughed. "It struck me my get-up was rather in the style of Ouida's heroes or an artist on the stage; so I've just been to the tailor's about a decent coat.

"You are past the velveteen age," said Eve. "I remember how proud you were of your first Bohemian habit,—you got it for your Academy work when you

were seventeen, and Aunt Dora hated it so."

Roland laughed. "A sin of one's youth," he said. "But you know I always dressed like a Christian when I took my walks abroad. How is your father?"

As they walked on, talking of the events of the past ten months, Evelyn looked at his face for a moment, to read what she might there, but it was little. The old restlessness had not gone, though it underlay other feelings, and she was saddened, she could not have told why.

"I'm not staying here," he said, moving his head back in the direction of the house. I'm at the Grosvenor, and only came here to look after things. I'm going to sell the house off. I can't bear it; it is too big since——"

"Will you stay in London?" she asked.

"I don't know," he answered. "I cannot say what I shall do—yet."

There was a ring of hope in his voice, which she misunderstood. "But," she said, "you have been idle a long while."

"I want to set to work again," he said. "I feel it in me; but, Eve, you are wrong, I have not been idle. Through all my London life I had time to forget what I had learnt as a boy. I have been learning it again at Rome and Florence; what painting really is." He read her look, and added, "Yes, you are right, I might have remembered it here — at the 'National,' alone. I went in there this morning, and I owned that, for this, I might have stayed at home, and let Our Lady of the Rocks and Titian's Ariadne keep me in mind of what — I cannot sham to you — I had forgotten, so that even striving died out of me."

She was silent, and they walked on side by side. At last he continued—

"They preached to me this morning, those two pictures; preached the sermon every great picture has spoken to me since—since—the ears of my mind have been opened. You know their lesson as well as I do—Michael Angelo's saying, 'Trifles make perfection, and perfection is no trifle.' Who am I that I should fling my daubed canvases into a future which will still hold their work? I remember once hearing two boys, Academy students, clever lads enough, admiring a rose on a dress, in a portrait of mine. 'Isn't it wonderful?' said one; 'painted with just two slicks of the brush.' So it had been; but Leonardo did not paint the narcissi at Our Lady's feet in that way. What they did, I cannot; but I have not even done what I could in workmanship, far less in the spirit of the work."

"But you will," was all she answered; but there was a gladness in her voice which thrilled his heart. So they reached Fainton Cottage, he wondering whether, in the days that were now before them, he would find the words to ask her to help him in the struggle towards the crown which had once seemed possible, but of late years had seemed so no longer; nay, the very existence of which he had striven to forget.

They reached the gate of the house. Roland opened it to let Evelyn pass in, but did not enter himself. She half stretched out her hand to bid him good-bye, then said, "But you are not going; do come in."

He stood in the road, the red brick houses opposite hot behind him; the dusty pavement hot beneath his feet; the sun striking hotly overhead. There was only the perforated wooden fence with

its low gate between him and Evelyn; yet she stood in the shade of the garden, the ivy that grew over the house making a green background, the heavy honey scent of the blossoms of the clipped lime-trees above her, and their dimpled leaf shadows casting light and shade on her slight form in its soft tinted summer dress; and on the face, which had lost nothing he had loved in the girl, but had gained in nobleness and depth. The contrast moved him; he had never meant to speak so soon—so suddenly; yet now, touched quickly, he said—

"Into your life?—it means that to me. Eve, let me! It is as you will."

For a moment she looked at him with frightened eyes, to read some other possible meaning to his words, but only to find his look confirm them.

"No!" she said. "No, I could not."

He forgot his fancy, opened the door, and was by her side.

"Eve, I can do nothing without you. Will you not help me, dear?"

She shook her head, and turned slowly into the house. He followed her into the room, where she stood as one asleep, seeming hardly to hear what he said.

"Can you never, Evelyn?" he pleaded. "Think a little; it is so different now to when we were boy and girl. Answer truly and gravely as you can."

"How can I answer you?" she said, with a sudden passion. "How can I take *her* place?"

"I spoke too soon."

"That makes no difference; it would always be the same. She was your wife, and you loved her as she loved you. She was my friend, and now you want me to come and steal all that was hers. How could I? How could you?"

"Why do you feel it like this?" he said; "your place is not hers. No one can rob another of their rights in that way. Eve, my life is nothing without you. I cannot live on a memory." Not even to her could he say, 'The memory is naught.' "And you," he pleaded, "could I not make you happy, dear? Let me try."

"If you were——" she said involuntarily, then would have recalled her words. "No," she said; "happiness is so little after all. And you have your Art."

"Do you measure Art by love?" he said. "It is nothing. I thought I knew that once, but I know it more truly now. Love me, and give me the wish to strive, though I do not think I can ever do what I used to imagine once. Eve, I know I ask very much; I can give very little. I almost wonder I dare to ask you."

"No!" she said, passionately, "don't speak so."

"Eve, if you can care for me, tell me so, honestly. I have a right to the truth."

She would have denied it: she tried to speak, but a sudden consciousness within her arrested her words. It was as though a long-sealed fountain, sprung up again into life, snapped its bonds. The colour of a strange wild flood, overflowing all things within her, rushed up to cheek and neck and brow, and Roland read its meaning, as he caught both her hands with a grasp she could not resist.

"Answer," he said; "but answer the truth, for God's sake, dear."

A moment, and the broken words of her thought struggled to her lips.

"She was good, and she loved you. She would have wished what was best for you; but oh, Roland, is this best?"

He never answered that yearning appeal in words, but as she felt the touch of his lips, the strong pressure of his arms, she felt as though the life which she had fancied had given her the best it held, were but begun. The old love! She loved him, she felt with shame and truth; her love was woven into her life.

Had it been dead, and was this a new love born within her? She could not tell; yet one thing she knew, it could never die again. Her life was with his and in his for evermore; this short for-ever of earth.

And this was the truth. It was best for her, this life, of all that the earth held, and in the years that followed, she felt it was complete. Max, when he came back to England and saw her face again, thanked God that he had chosen rightly for her; that there was no shade in those clear eyes which should make him fear for her: only

the sweetness of a great love that does not count cost, and is justified of love. So he, whose passion had been of a like kind, stood back in the shade, and in time was content.

When Evelyn first married, she hoped that with the new rest of a quiet life Roland's old power would again show its strength. In this, the deepest desire of her heart, she was denied. He painted well, charmingly, sweetly. He was born a painter, and certain good gifts would be his to the end; but that something, which had raised him above his compeers, *that* had died, died in the long unrest of the years that were past, as a tale that is told.

They were past, but their work remained. No one knew the secret sadness of Evelyn Trench, when she saw her husband satisfied with his work, which did not content her soul, nor would have once contented his.

He worked earnestly and loyally. His

wife's influence saved him from drifting back into the fashion of scamping and incompleteness of labour; but the old uplifting of the spirit seldom stirred him now, or filled his painting with a hint of the divine secret which holds us before a picture in forgetfulness of all else. The talent was there, but genius had died, killed by the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches, sown by a woman's hand.

THE END.

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